

SPECIAL ISSUE ON RELIGION

"It is a tree of life to those who seize it, and its supporters are praiseworthy." Proverbs 3:18

"Wood" your child like to find another metaphor? Ask them to try and locate it in this issue. (Hint Word: "Pair!")

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Weekly Parsha

Tazria Metzora

RABBI BERNARD FOX

"If a person has upon his skin a white blotch, discoloration or spot and it is suspected of being a mark of the tzara'at affliction upon his skin, he shall be brought to Ahron the Kohen or one of his children the Kohanim." (VaYikra 13:2)

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Religion

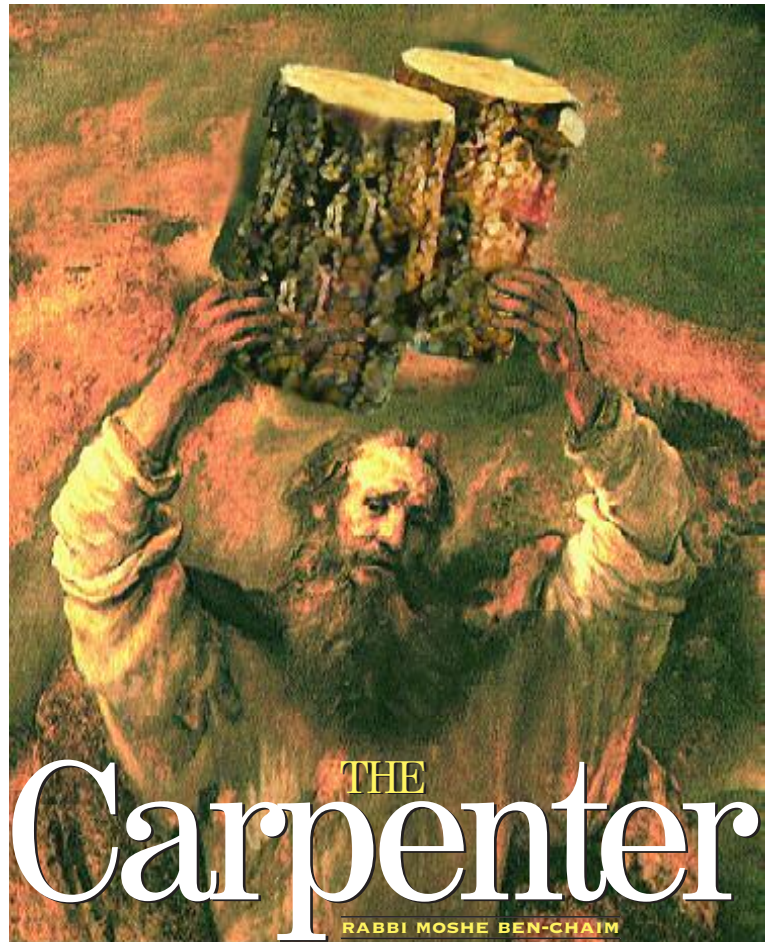
Numbers vs Truth

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

In the world of philosophy, the truth is eternal: what was true, will always be true. This is because reality is determined by G-d, Who knows all events that have happened, and will come to be. G-d's truth is not subject to variation. No "new" considerations come before G-d, the Knower of all times. Even as our times change, G-d's knowledge has already seen the end of time, and nonetheless, He formulated a Torah with precise rules and laws. Hence, there can be only one truth that G-d possesses, and one truth, which He handed to mankind. We have discussed this many times: Revelation at Sinai was the only event in all of history where masses witnessed G-d's revelation. No other religion makes this claim, and just the opposite is true: other religions incorporate our Torah – a testament to our Torah's absolute truth. (But we do not depend on their confirmation to validate Torah.)

When sharing this position, people will often jump to the defense of Christians, and others, accusing Judaism of boasting a haughty tone, sort of an "I'm right and they're wrong" attitude. They feel Judaism is out to attack all other peoples. However, nothing can be further

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I'd like to tell you a true story...

Long ago, on an island named Ianis, when trees had not yet grown, vegetation was limited to plants, fruit shrubs, and ground-grown vegetables. The islanders lived in huts made of reeds, for wood was still unknown to them. Years later, a traveling carpenter named Sesom arrived at this island with many types of Harot tree shoots, and planted them there for the islanders' benefit. After many years, Sesom had grown a beautiful forest. However, since the islanders had never seen trees before, they had no idea what to do with them. Sesom had received his carpentry training from a master, who actually first invented the art of carpentry. Sesom, being an expert, then trained the islanders in woodworking, carpentry, architecture,

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and construction. He taught the islanders all he knew. Half of Sesom's training of these islanders addressed the physical characteristics of wood, and various species of trees: how to saw, carve, sand, and finish the wood. Sesom demonstrated this physically. But the other half of his teachings was abstract principles, essential for building furniture, homes, and great structures. This knowledge could not be seen "in the wood" of course, as they were abstract principles and laws. They had to be learned over years from Sesom, orally.

Sesom had to train these islanders to think about construction, as they never knew what construction was. To them, it was a completely new science, something they were unfamiliar with. Without knowing what wood was, and they could never fathom the science of construction. Many islanders, as soon as they got their hands on this new substance called wood, were overeager to start working with the wood, and didn't attend Sesom's classes. These few islanders built homes, but they all quickly collapsed. They realized they too required Sesom's knowledge, so they attended his classes. Before long, all of the islanders were knowledgeable in woodworking, carpentry, and architecture. The islanders built great homes, all of which remained standing for many years.

Sesom desired that no one on even the furthest reaches of this island ever experience a home collapsing again. Sesom desired that the original principles of carpentry and architecture never be lost. He also knew that no one, without Sesom's original training, could ever understand how to build, simply by examining the physical wood. Training had to accompany any would-be builder, and that training had to trace back to Sesom's lessons and thinking. Sesom alone possessed the highest knowledge of woodworking and building, and was the best teacher. Therefore, Sesom transmitted his teachings to the islanders with one condition: "Do not deviate from my teachings, because your homes will collapse. Follow my lessons, because they are not seen in the wood itself. Without my verbal lessons, you cannot possibly learn how to build properly. It is impossible. The wood does not come with instructions written in it; those instructions are in my mind, and in the minds of my students. You may learn from them, or from me. But someone who did not train under me, or under my students for many years, cannot possibly have the true, original knowledge of building." These were Sesom's instructions, for the benefit of his fellow islanders.

As the years passed, Sesom died. The islanders flourished, spreading out far and wide, and carried with them both Sesom's wood in hand, and his teachings in their thoughts. For 3000 years, the islanders steadfastly followed the craftsmanship and principles taught by Sesom, and worked only with his wood. All the houses and structures they built were stable. Those who had built homes with incomplete knowledge did have some problems. But they asked for solutions from the older builders, who knew the principles, and they repaired their homes with success.

About that same time, an islander from afar named Demrofer obtained some of the wood, but did not train with Sesom, nor did he follow the teachings of Sesom's students. He built many homes, but they constantly collapsed, and required daily carpentry. For him, it was easier not to spend years studying the principles of Sesom, but just jump right into building with no training. Although easier, it proved to be a poor decision for Demrofer. So he tried to develop his own ideas about building, but again, his structures all fell to the ground. Whenever he looked at a home that was properly built, he only saw the wood, because the "principles" of building are not things man can see with his eye. The principles were not "in the wood", but had to be learned from someone who knew them. He realized that the wood itself was only one half of what he needed to build properly. Nonetheless, Demrofer refused to study under Sesom's followers.

As was Demrofer, other islanders were also impatient and abandoned training under Sesom's students. They collectively created a new group of islanders. They attempted to build structures as perfect as Sesom's followers, but they constantly fell to the ground. Although it was a more tedious existence to constantly rebuild, Demrofer's people were stubborn,



and did not take the time to study, and learn how to build perfect structures. True, it was initially easier to bypass study and quickly jump into construction, but each time, that ease met with frustration, as their structures required daily maintenance.

As is the way with mankind, laziness is emotionally attractive, whereas rigorous study requires restrictive discipline. Therefore, Demrofer attracted far greater followers than did Sesom. In time, even many of Sesom's people defected to Demrofer's side of the island.

Demrofer's movement is now about 200 years old. Many follow him. However, Demrofer was never successful at one thing, claiming authorship to carpentry and building. Even those in his camp know that historically, Sesom was the originator.

The Metaphor

I'm sure many of you have figured out what I am describing. Yes, this is a true story, but the names must be reversed, if you are to arrive at the metaphor's true meaning: The island of Ianis is Sinai, Sesom of course is Moses, Harot (wood) is Torah, and Demrofer is Reformed Judaism.

Moses brought "Harot" wood or rather the Torah to the Jews. With it, one can build great "structures" of wisdom, and learn new, true principles which are foundations of even greater ones...but on the condition that the other half of Moses' teachings accompany the "building" or Torah learning process. This other half of Moses' teachings is the Oral Law. Moses did not receive a Torah scroll alone, but also a body of knowledge and principles called the Oral Law. These were never written down until years later, for fear of losing them.

On Sinai, G-d gave Moses the Written and Oral Laws. Sesom taught the islanders of Ianis, it is impossible to use this wood and build anything, unless you understand the building process. So too, it is impossible for one to refer to the Written Torah alone and succeed at arriving at G-d's true Torah, if one ignores training under a teacher, who also studied under another teacher, all the way back to Moses. If one would study the Written Torah alone, and attempt to arrive at an understanding of G-d's word, he must fail. In such a process, he ignores half of G-d's word to Moses, i.e., the Oral Law.

The Oral Law is not simply a body of knowledge. It was given orally for a reason: G-d desired that it be taught only in a 'teacher-to-student' fashion. In this manner, it is assured that the original "method of study" received by Moses, will be successfully handed down, person-to-person, generation-to-generation. Only in a teacher-to-student style is the exclusive method of study, and are the original concepts transmitted. This fashion of transmission was in fact how Moses transmitted the Torah to Aaron, to his sons, to the elders, and to the Jews. He did not teach it to all of them in one sitting. But if someone does, as did the Reformers of Judaism, and veers at all from the Sages of the Talmud, who received their training all the way back to Moses,

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then these Reformed Jews no longer have the exact Torah system that Moses had. Herein lies the grave nature of the crime of reforming or conserving the original Torah...it is no longer G-d's exact Torah, and for that matter, not Torah.

G-d gave Moses 613 commands. Two of them are, not to add, and not to subtract from His words. The Reformers violated these very commands. G-d knew what was the best system for all generations. G-d knows the future. For man to suggest that the Torah requires an update or adaptation based on considerations of "modern times", man foolishly suggests that G-d was unaware that Torah required the flexibility to tolerate change. Based on this same argument, we discount Christianity's claim that a "new covenant" abrogates G-d's prior commands.

It is man's arrogance and ignorance, which leads him to feel he possesses more knowledge than the original Torah recipients. How can one know better than the teacher? The islanders of Ianis could not figure out how to build without Sesom's instruction. For 3000 years, from Moses, through the elders and the Prophets, and the Sages through the Rishonim (medieval Rabbis) not one of these great individuals or Prophets suggested what the Reformers suggested. It is truly amazing, that those famous leaders who contributed to the Torah's content, who wrote Psalms, Proverbs, Deuteronomy, and those like Maimonides and Ramban, never suggested what the Reformers suggest. The original leaders of Torah, the true recipients of Moses law, the Torah's "authors", certainly possess greater authority than those who have not trained in Oral Law. Just as Demrofer could not study the wood to gain the principles of construction, the Reformers cannot examine the Written Law to arrive at what the Oral Law is. Without years of tutelage, tracing back to Moses, one cannot arrive at the knowledge, or the method of Talmudic and Torah study and elucidation.

The following are examples of Reform's deviations from G-d's Torah:

Samuel Holdheim (a major early reformer):

"The present requires a principle that shall clearly enunciate that a law, even though divine, is potent only so long as the conditions and circumstances of life, to meet which it was enacted, continue; when these change, however, the law must also be abrogated, even though it have God as its author....The Talmud speaks with the ideology of its own time, and for that time it was right. I speak from the higher ideology of my time, and for this age I am right." (Blau, MODERN VARIETIES OF JUDAISM, p.37)

THE PITTSBURGH PLATFORM, "prepared in 1885 by a group of 15 Rabbis...became the guiding principles of Reform Judaism in America for 50 years (Isaacs, p 58):

- *We accept as binding only the moral laws and maintain only such ceremonies as elevate and sanctify our lives, but reject all such as are not adapted to the views and habits of modern civilization.*
- *We hold that all such Mosaic and rabbinical laws as regulate diet, priestly purity and dress originated in ages and under the influence of ideas altogether foreign to our present mental and spiritual state. They fail to impress the modern Jew with a spirit of priestly holiness; their observance in our days is apt rather to obstruct than to further spiritual elevation. (Courtesy bluethread.com)*

For 3000 years since the giving of the Written and Oral Laws, Judaism held steadfast to G-d's Torah, which He commanded we not alter, nor veer from the Rabbis "left or right". G-d knows both, the over-religious emotions, and the emotion of modernity. With the over-religious emotion, man desires to do what G-d has not commanded, as seen in Aaron's two sons who offered a "strange fire". They met with death. The opposite emotion is to diminish from G-d's laws, or alter them, for many reasons, including Reform's rationale of modernity.

G-d created man. G-d knows the future. G-d gave one system. If we are to benefit and live the best of lives, we are well advised to follow what the Creator intended, as is seen in the practice of His Prophets. G-d did not select Moses, Joshua, David, Solomon, and all the Prophets, had they deviated from His word. These men were inspired by G-d's words, precisely because they followed G-d. G-d does not place His opponents in leadership roles. By the very fact that a Prophet was addressed by G-d, we are taught that G-d condones this person and his teachings. It is therefore a clear lesson that we are to follow these Prophets, and those who do not veer from their words.



Orthodox Judaism is the original Judaism, and adheres meticulously to the teachings of Moses, Joshua, David, Solomon, the Prophets, and the Sages of the Talmud. For 3000 years none disputed Judaism's singular identity, an unchanging system, even with the change in times.

Do not be impressed with large numbers, nor with new sects within Judaism. Their founders boast no comparison to a Maimonides, a true genius whose works boggle our minds. Reform's founders and followers display no sign of Orthodoxy's adherence to Moses Torah, nor does Reform Judaism have any founder who comes close to the genius of Orthodoxy's giants.

Had Reform or Conservative Judaism been correct, that they truly possessed G-d's word and intent, they would have had the Prophets, and not Orthodoxy.

It is to our benefit that we follow G-d's exact intent and words. Otherwise, we are likened to a builder with no guiding plans. We will watch our entire efforts end in collapse. This applies not only to how we run our individual lives, but how we run the greater body: the Jewish nation.

The greater the structure, the greater the collapse. □

Postscript

Although I mention this periodically, I feel at the end of this article in specific it is important to reiterate: Our goal is to study and teach with complete honesty. We do not respect any other consideration with greater allegiance, as this would forfeit our attainment of new truths about G-d, reality, and how we must live. This means that at times, we must expose the fallacy of false systems. Of course, those not fully appreciating our intent will accuse us of simply bashing others, but nothing can be further from the truth. As an educator, my concern is to make available to others, that which I see as true. I desire nothing other than enlightening a student with an idea that appeals to me as truth. And the more students I can teach, the greater the good achieved. Conversely, I always ask that if an idea presented is incorrect, that the reader notify me so I may change it. I hope this article is viewed in the light intended.

– Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim

(Numbers vs Truth continued from page 1)

from the truth. G-d's concern is that all people recognize Him, and His singular, Torah system. We recite these very words three times daily in the "Alaynu" prayer. The Jew is G-d's emissary to the other nations - we are to teach all others. This is why we are "chosen", not for ourselves, but to be a light unto the nations. Jews, who do not care for all other people, violate G-d's will.

When Judaism, or any of the Sages or Rabbis discuss, and expose falsehoods in alien religions and cultures, what they accuse is the "false notions", not the followers. People come and go, while false ideas continue through the generations. Therefore, a wise man knows that dealing with a transient individual, who lives and dies, does not successfully expose an idea as false. Religious fallacy exists in the "idea". Arguments exposing falsehoods must be verbalized, and written down, so others may not fall prey to what is appealing on the surface, but deadly underneath. 'Deadly', because one's soul is at stake. One must always address the idea, not the person following the idea.

It must be clear: G-d does not approve of any deviation from what is absolute truth. Two of His 613 commands are not to add or to subtract from His Torah. This is so obviously right and true. But unfortunately, man possesses emotions that severely compromise his clear perception of truth. We must constantly detect, with our utmost honesty, when and how we veer from clear thought.

For example, tell any person that only one religion can be G-d's truly given law, and they will probably think a second, and nod with some casual affirmation. It makes no sense that G-d gave two, opposing laws. That would mean G-d contradicts himself. But this same person, witnessing a world populated with billions, many of whom follow various philosophies, will feel intimidated by such grandiose numbers. There are false ideas he would normally disagree with when espoused by a single individual. But when held by millions, he will suddenly agree with masses, and not his original rationale. When faced with such "odds", he suddenly lacks the backbone to stand by his own view when it flies in the face of popular opinion.

We must ask ourselves why, when confronted with the reality of disagreeing with so many others, do we feel the need to change our views. It is apparent: such an individual bases his or her reality on what the masses do and say. This is the error, and many people succumb. Yes, it is difficult to admit that a majority of the world's population possess false ideas. But if you search for truth, then only "reason" must guide your search. No other consideration may enter your thinking if you are to arrive at a perception of what is absolute truth - what is G-d's will.

The need to be accepted by others is such a powerful and predominant emotion, that so many people forfeit their allegiance to truth, in favor of gaining the friendship of others. Perhaps by isolating some key points, we may help address this problem:

1) Numbers vs Truth: G-d does not approve of masses in place of truth, as witnessed by His several acts of annihilation, such as the Flood in Noah's times, and the destruction of Sodom and Amora in Abraham's times. G-d was not impressed with what the entire world held as just and true. He spared only Noah and seven others. Masses never determine what is right and true. G-d teaches us to follow this same path.

2) Approval: Seeking the approval of someone who follows fallacy is foolish. Be it one person, or a million followers of another religion: what is false, is false. Don't delude yourself with arguments such as, "It's impossible that so many people follow this religion, and they are all wrong." Our previous statement teaches you that G-d Himself desires that we follow truth, and those masses - even a world population - can be absolutely wrong.

3) "Acceptance": Some people uphold an opinion that we must be "accepting" of others, and our position of absolute truth is contrary to "acceptance". They feel we are to be condemned for such non-acceptance. Our answer again must be what G-d teaches: those who violate G-d's words are wrong. G-d does not desire that innocent people be misled, so there are

severe penalties for false prophets, such as Jesus. G-d does not support the movement of "Acceptance", where we must accept all religions.

4) Family: We are in conflict when we must (if only in our thoughts) condemn friends or relatives. We may have family members with us, or who have passed, who were such loving people. We miss them greatly. We continue to learn G-d's Torah, and are then confronted with His laws that condemn some of the values held by our dear relatives. We are struck with tremendous guilt: do we accept G-d and condemn what our loved ones did? Or, do we favor the fond memories of our grandparents or parents, while denying G-d's words? Again, truth is not determined by how it affects our memories, or current relationships. Agreeing with truths, at times, will place our loved ones in a poor light. Love for others does not condone their error. Honesty, and attachment to G-d must be our reality, and our relationship with G-d, more essential than our relationships with man.

5) Many Paths to G-d?: There is a popular opinion - even among so called "orthodox" Jews - that there are many paths to G-d. Again we must follow reason, not reputation. This view of "many paths" means there is some good in all religions. But I ask, "Is it correct for a Christian to follow the Christian religion? Is it correct for a Muslim that he follows the Muslim religion? This would also mean that it is not correct for a Christian to follow the Muslim religion. (A problem for a person who converts.) Let us make our words clear: What makes a person a "Christian" or a "Muslim"? Being born to parents who follow the Christian religion does not make a person Christian. Because, if the child learns of another religion and then chooses to convert, he will not be Christian. Another religion will openly accept him. Being born into his religion can be changed. All religions besides Judaism, say how you are born, is not what makes you that religion. We have proved that a person is not born as a "Christian" or as a "Muslim", but he is born as a man or woman. Religion comes later. How a person chooses to live is what makes him, either Christian, Muslim, or another religion. To say, "Who is born Christian should follow Christianity" is not a correct statement. All religions agree that theirs is correct, and all the others are incorrect. Therefore, the inventors of the religions themselves deny the "all paths to G-d" theory. This theory is yet another, ignorant position, conjured up to satisfy one's insecurity to be accepted. But our proof whether or not there are many paths to G-d is not dependent on world opinion, but on truth. One must see clearly that Revelation at Sinai was the only event - ever - where G-d gave man a religion. There is only one G-d given religion, and such a statement is not intended to be boastful, but to be instructive. G-d Himself commanded not to alter the Torah. His giving of a single system testifies to His commitment to a single, never changing law.

There will be times when admitting truth will cause friction with others. But we must be steadfast; separating uncomfortable emotions from what our minds tell us is real. All the people in the world will never convince us that $2+2=5$, even if many are our own dear friends or relatives, threatening to disown us. Our minds know that this equation is false. Numbers cannot change what our minds see as reality. With similar honesty, we will admit G-d's principles, and His warnings against following false ideas and religious beliefs. We must keep our desire for truth as our central focus. If we see we deviate from this objective, we must immediately stop, and examine what is pulling us away from our desire for truth. By such regular introspection, we can align ourselves with the singular path G-d desires we follow, a path where "all her ways are pleasant, and all her paths are peace." These are King Solomon's words in Proverbs, 3:17. Do not compromise truth for any consideration. Do not desire friendship and the love of others, or fond memories if this distorts of G-d's words. Do not create new notions, like "all religions have some good", if this is not what G-d said. Do not try to salvage your own subjective feelings of comfort, retaining a familiar lifestyle. Rather, change yourself to be aligned with truth.

Perfecting our thoughts and actions is our goal. There is nothing that outshines our one-time, G-d given opportunity. ■

Tzaria Metzora

RABBI BERNARD FOX

This pasuk introduces the Torah's discussion of tzara'at. Tzara'at is an affliction often translated as leprosy. In appearance there may be similarities between tzara'at and leprosy. However, these two afflictions are very different. Leprosy is caused by biological factors. Tzara'at is caused by spiritual factors. It is a punishment, from Hashem, for misconduct. A person suffering from tzara'at cannot be cured through medical treatment. Instead a process of seclusion, proscribed by the Torah, is required. This process is supervised by the Kohen. During the period of seclusion, the afflicted individual is required to examine his or her behavior. Only through repentance can the individual be cured from the tzara'at. The Kohen periodically examines the afflicted person and determines the status of the affliction. Upon the pronouncement of the Kohen, the afflicted individual is regarded as cured. At this point, the individual can begin a process of reentering the community.

Our Sages discuss at length the spiritual shortcomings that cause tzara'at. One prominent cause is tale-bearing and defamation of others. The phenomenon of tzara'at reinforces the sinfulness of such behaviors. Sefer HaChinuch, in his discussion of tzara'at, does not dwell upon the specific sins that cause the affliction. Instead, he explains a different lesson to be derived from these laws.

Our behaviors affect the condition of our soul. Righteous behavior brings us closer to our Creator. His influence over our lives increases as we improve our character and behaviors. Conversely, evil actions have a degenerative effect upon our souls. Such behaviors create a barrier between the individual and Hashem. This barrier reduces the providential influence in our lives or result in punishment.

The results of righteousness or iniquity are real. However, they are not concrete or detectable by the senses. This allows us to falsely believe that our moral or religious behaviors do not really make a difference. Tzara'at helps counter this impression. Through tzara'at iniquity results in a physical effect. Divine reward and punishment become readily visible.

This lesson is reinforced in a second way. Tzara'at can only be treated through repentance.



Spiritual improvement is the cure. Again, this teaches us that our moral and religious behaviors determine the nature of our relationship to Hashem. The person suffering from tzara'at learns an essential lesson. These behaviors have a real effect.

“And the Kohen shall see. And the tzara'at has covered all of his skin, then he shall declare the afflicted person clean. As long as he has turned completely white, he is clean.” (VaYikra 13:13)

A person whose skin is generally healthy but a small portion is afflicted with tzara'at is unclean. However, a person completely covered by the affliction is considered clean. This seems somewhat odd. A small blotch of tzara'at is adequate to render a generally, healthy person unclean. Yet, a person covered with the affliction from head to toe is clean!

This paradox can be explained through an analysis of the definition of tzara'at. Tzara'at is an affliction of the skin. It must exist in contrast to healthy skin. This contrast is essential to the definition of tzara'at. Without the contrast,

tzara'at does not exist. Therefore, a person completely covered with the affliction is not deemed unclean. There is no contrast. The criteria for tzara'at have not been met.

The issues can also be viewed at a deeper level. Let us begin by considering another issue. A person afflicted with the discoloration of tzara'at is immediately brought to the Kohen. After examination, the Kohen must determine the status of the individual. This decision has various ramifications that are discussed in the parasha. It is sufficient to note that advanced tzara'at is far more serious than the preliminary form of the affliction.

Tzara'at of the skin is evaluated on the basis of three symptoms. Any one of these symptoms indicates that the tzara'at is advanced. One of the symptoms is a discoloration of the hair in the affected area. This discoloration is a change from the natural color to white. The presence of white hair is an indication of advanced tzara'at.

Imagine a person finds a white blotch upon the skin. The person sees that white hair is present. May the person remove the white hair before consulting the Kohen? This is prohibited.[1] Nonetheless, if the law is violated and the hair is removed, the intervention is effective. The Kohen must evaluate the person as he or she appears.[2] At the time the person appears before the Kohen, the white hair is not present.

This might seem a little odd. The Torah is creating a tremendous temptation. The metzora has the opportunity to remove the hair before appearing before the Kohen. The intervention is effective. Yet, the metzora is expected to refrain from taking this step!

In order to respond to these issues, we need to understand the function of this affliction. Tzara'at is a Divine punishment. It is attributed to lashon hara – tale bearing and gossip.[3] The affliction is a warning designed to encourage repentance. The tzara'at cannot be treated medically. Only spiritual improvement cures the disease.

The affliction cannot be relieved until the person is declared unclean and begins the process of repentance and spiritual cleansing. This is adequate motivation to prevent a person from removing the signs of tzara'at. Little will be gained through the intervention. Much will

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Tazria Metzora

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be lost. True, the intervention will influence the declaration of the Kohen. However, the affliction will continue unabated. The person can only begin the process of purification after the declaration of the Kohen. In other words, one must first accept the status of being unclean. Then one may begin the process of purification.

This provides a possible deeper understanding of the law governing the person completely covered with the affliction. The person is not declared unclean. This is not a leniency. Until the person is declared unclean, the process of purification cannot begin. The affliction will continue. Only after a healthy portion of skin appears, can the person be identified as a metzora. With this declaration, the process of repentance and purification can begin.

“All the days that he is afflicted with the disease he shall be unclean. He is unclean. He shall dwell alone. Outside of the camp shall be his dwelling.” (VaYikra 13:46)

A person declared to be a metzora is segregated from the community. Rashi explains the reason for this law. Tzara'at is a Divine punishment for lashon hara. These activities create division and strife. The segregation of the metzora is a fitting punishment. He has caused division within the community. It is appropriate that his punishment should include exclusion from the community.[4]

Daat Zekaynim offers another explanation for this law. The affliction of tzara'at is a Divine punishment. However, the disease is a physical ailment and contagious. The metzora is quarantined in order to prevent the spread of the disease.[5]

The explanation of Daat Zekaynim presents an interesting problem. The disease of tzara'at can be communicated through contact with the metzora. Yet, halacha treats the metzora as guilty of a crime. This treatment implies that the ailment was not contracted by natural means! How can this assertion be made? The possibility of natural transmission does exist!

Maimonides explains that the laws of the Torah are designed to encourage physical, as well as spiritual well-being. In discussing the

laws regulating our eating, he elaborates on this theme. He explains that the foods prohibited by the Torah are generally unhealthy.[6] It must be noted that Maimonides is not asserting that the reason for these laws is simply to ensure good health. He explains that the Torah regulates our behavior in order to encourage temperance and moderation.[7] However, these prohibitions, which encourage temperance, are not arbitrary. They offer the secondary benefit of encouraging good health.

Modern medical science may differ with some of Maimonides' theories regarding proper diet. Yet, his basic assumption is reasonable. The Torah is a guide for the proper life. It is appropriate to assume that the various laws encourage physical well-being.

Rabbaynu Yitzchak Karo answers our question based upon Maimonides' thesis. He explains that it is possible for tzara'at to be transmitted naturally. However, confronted with an individual suffering from the disease, we do not assume that a natural transmission took place. We assume that the ailment represents a Divine punishment. What is the basis for this assumption? The Torah regulates our consumption and hygiene. Through these regulations, the physical causes for the disease are controlled. Therefore, halacha assumes that the contraction of the disease is not a result of natural transmission.[8]

Rabbaynu Yitzchak Karo explains another mystery regarding tzara'at based upon this same approach. The Torah outlines various forms of tzara'at. If tzara'at is a Divine punishment, why are all of these forms needed? He explains that although the disease is a spiritual punishment, it is a natural phenomenon. In other words, the Almighty causes the person to contract a natural ailment. A physical ailment will take slightly different forms in various people. A single disease has different symptoms in different people. Therefore, tzara'at will appear in varying forms.[9]

[1] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Mishne Torah, Hilchot Tumat Tzara'at 10:1.

[2] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam /

Maimonides) Mishne Torah, Hilchot Tumat Tzara'at, 10:2.

[3] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Mishne Torah, Hilchot Tumat Tzara'at, 16:10.

[4] Rabbaynu Shlomo ben Yitzchak (Rashi), Commentary on Sefer VaYikra 13:46.

[5] Daat Zekaynim Commentary on Sefer VaYikra 13:46

[6] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Moreh Nevuchim, volume 3, chapter 48.

[7] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Commentary on the Mishne, Introduction to Avot, chapter 5.

[8] Rabbaynu Yitzchak Karo, Toldot Yitzchak, Commentary on Sefer VaYikra 12:2-5.

[9] Rabbaynu Yitzchak Karo, Toldot Yitzchak, Commentary on Sefer VaYikra, 13:9-13. □

“And the person being purified must wash his clothes. And he shall shave off his hair. And he shall immerse in water and be pure. After he shall come to the camp. And he shall dwell outside of his tent seven days.” (VaYikra 14:8)

The pasuk explains a portion of the purification process for an individual who is afflicted with tzara'at. The process includes immersion in a mikveh.

Sefer HaChinuch discusses the function of this immersion. He explains that immersion represents a rebirth. [1] Why is this symbolic rebirth needed?

Our behaviors are influenced by our perception of ourselves. A person with a poor self-image will usually conduct his or her affairs in a manner consistent with this image. A sinful person cannot alter behaviors without a change in self-image. This is the most difficult aspect of repentance. Appreciating the error of sin is only a first step. Even sincere regret cannot have a lasting effect upon future conduct. A drastic long-term change in behavior requires the establishment of a new identity. Only if this new image is developed, will long-term change be assured.

Immersion in the mikveh symbolizes this

Tazria Metzora

RABBI BERNARD FOX

concept. The truly repentant individual must break away from the previous self-image. A rebirth must take place. Only with the establishment of a new self can the repentant individual succeed.

“And the Kohen shall command that the house should be emptied before the Kohen comes to view the affliction. And everything in the house shall not become unclean. And after this the Kohen shall come to see the house.” (VaYikra 14:36)

The Chumash explains that tzara'at is not only an affliction of the body. Tzara'at can also appear as a discoloration of a garment. A house can also be afflicted by tzara'at. Obviously, the tzara'at that appears upon houses and garments is not the same physical condition affecting the body. The Torah uses the same term for all three afflictions. This is not intended to imply that the three phenomena are identical. The common term reflects that all three conditions are related.[2]

Our pasuk discusses tzara'at of the house. The Torah explains that before the Kohen evaluates the house it is emptied of possessions. If the Kohen identifies the discoloration as tzara'at, all the items in the house will become unclean. Rashi explains that this is the reason for removing the possessions. The Torah is demonstrating compassion for the material well-being of the owner.[3]

Sforno understands this issue differently. The Torah instructs the Kohen to delay his arrival. The Kohen should not view the home until the possessions are removed. This creates a delay. First, the owner suspects that the home may have tzara'at and the Kohen is summoned. Then this delay occurs. After the delay, the Kohen arrives and makes his pronouncement.

What is the purpose of the delay? Sforno explains that this period offers the owner the opportunity to repent. As the owner removes all possessions from the home, there is an opportunity to consider the implications of the events occurring. This will, hopefully, encourage the owner to reassess his or her behavior.[4]

“If a woman has a discharge of blood that emerges from her body, seven days she shall be ritually unclean because of her menstruation. And anyone touching her shall be unclean until evening.” (VaYikra 15:19)

This pasuk introduces the law of the nidah. A woman, during the period of menstruation, becomes ritually unclean for seven days. During this time marital relations are prohibited.

Marriage involves a lifelong partnership between husband and wife. This is a wonderful relationship. The Almighty did not create the human to live in solitude. The marital partnership is essential to human happiness. However, marriage presents challenges for both partners. It requires compromise predicated upon mutual love and affection. The emotions flowing between husband and wife bind the partners together as a unit.

Inevitably, with the passage of time, familiarity develops. With familiarity the intensity of the feeling shared by husband and wife can dissipate. This can be disastrous. Without these feelings, it is difficult for individuals to spend their lives together. The motivation to resolve marital conflicts and reach compromises falters. With familiarity, intimate relations, between husband and wife, become less exciting. Intimacy may become replaced by boredom or disillusionment.

How can the long-term nature of the marital relationship be reconciled with the danger of familiarity? Sefer HaChinuch explains that the law of nidah responds to this conflict. Through observing this command, husband and wife forgo intimacy for a portion of each month. This abstention helps foster renewed appreciation and desire. When the nidah period ends the couple is fully reunited. The reunion rekindles the intense feelings between husband and wife. Marriage and mutual appreciation coexist. □

[1] Rav Ahron HaLeyve, Sefer HaChinuch, Mitzvah 173.

[2] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Mishne Torah, Hilchot Tumat Tzara'at, 16:10.

[3] Rabbaynu Shlomo ben Yitzchak (Rashi), Commentary on Sefer VaYikra 14:37.

[4] Rabbaynu Ovadia Sforno, Commentary on Sefer VaYikra 14:37.

Tolerating Religions

ROY NEAL GRISSOM

The following is in response to an article printed elsewhere, defending Vatican Council II.

Mr. Grissom's sentiments require broader publication, and I reprint them here.

-Moshe Ben-Chaim

"As a former convert to Catholicism who is now a practicing Ben Noach, I am no friend of any form of Catholicism--leftwing or rightwing. However, I found one aspect of your article on Mel Gibson's "The Passion" extremely troubling.

Your endorsement of Vatican Council II as positive "in every way" is extremely shortsighted. True, one outcome of that Council was a lessening of the Church's anti-Semitism. However, this solitary jewel was buried in a mountain of dung. Vatican Council II was a triumph for liberal Catholics who subscribed to the "new age" doctrines of Teilhard de Chardin and to the notorious German Protestant higher criticism of the Torah. One reason I left my new "home" in the Catholic Church for Noachut was the post Vatican II Church's irreverent attitude towards the Torah, which it believes is the work of "redactors" who spliced together a number of Mesopotamian and Canaanite myths. Needless to say, liberal Catholics (for all their "philo-semitism") do not believe that HaShem actually commanded the extermination of the Seven Nations of Canaan, but that the blood-thirsty, primitive Jews merely "thought" He did. Liberal Catholics, you see, believe in "progressive revelation," that G-d is "a work in progress." And do you know who the ultimate negation of this "vicious" "old testament" G-d is? That's right--the same J*sus whom you seem to think they despise.

I simply do not understand why Torah Jews are such enthusiastic supporters and defenders of liberal chr*stians. Is "tolerance" so important that it trumps the universal prohibition of idolatry? Is HaShem so unimportant that it is unimportant whether or not non-Jews acknowledge Him so long as they are "tolerant" of the Jewish people? Or perhaps HaShem only wants the Jewish people to believe in Him and desires all other people to be atheists?

I for one am tired of Torah Judaism's utterly false image of being more liberal, tolerant, rational, and humanistic than chr*stianity. I LEFT chr*stianity because it is all those things and Judaism is NOT. Most non-Jews may be unaware of just how Fundamentalist Torah Judaism is, but I am not. I am aware that every letter (including the sizes, shapes,

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names, and even the spaces) were dictated to Mosheh by HaShem Yitbarakh Shemo. I am aware that there were precisely ten generations from 'Adam to Noach, ten generations from Noach to 'Avraham, and six generations from Noach to Mosheh. I know that it is a mitzvah to exterminate the nations of Canaan and Amaleq, and that the Holy Temple must be rebuilt and the sacrifices (how do you explain THOSE away?) must be reinstated. As an observant Ben Noach I wish non-Jews to forsake false religions and embrace HaShem's demands of them, the Seven Laws of the Sons of Noah. Yet what to Jews do? Do they teach us about HaShem? Do they teach us about the Torah? No. They remain absolutely silent about mankind's duties to HaShem and instead celebrate and endorse liberal chr*stians who blaspheme HaShem and His Torah, all because of their "tolerance!" I am disgusted.

Perhaps you should do a survey to determine just how many Benei Noach started out as "tolerant" liberal chr*stians. I think you'll find that the nature of liberalism--the denial of any sort of objective religious truth--makes it impossible for any liberal to come to HaShem. Why do even Torah Jews prefer atheist chr*stians to sincere Noachides? Why??

For two hundred years the Jewish leadership has embraced a doctrine of "pluralism" and "tolerance" that is contrary to Torah and which Yehoshua Bin Nun would never recognize. All the "tolerance" has done is get Benei Yisra'el and Medinat Yisra'el branded as hypocrites for every time they have attempted to defend themselves. Torah Judaism cannot coexist with the philosophy that erects "museums of tolerance" and which rewards liberal chr*stians for blaspheming the Holy Torah. Tear down those museums (or else change them to museums of HaShem, Torah, or Likud Ha'Aretz) and instead build the Beit HaMiqdash. Expel the goyim from 'Eretz HaQodesh create the Torah Society mandated by HaShem. And instead of seeking the impossible--to coexist with the false world of the Goyim--wage Milchemet Gog uMagog to



COMPEL them to accept, not tolerance, but Sheva HaMitzvot.

I recently observed elsewhere that most people are completely ignorant of the actual contents of Judaism (the prayers, Torah from Heaven, the lulav bundles, the Halakic method of putting on one's shoes, blessing G-d after relieving oneself, etc.). This totalitarian Theocratic system clashes so radically with Judaism's public image of a modern, rational, humanistic, and above all, TOLERANT religion, that I cannot but believe Torah philosophy has been compromised in the minds of many observant Jews who have been living as Fundamentalists within the minyan and liberals outside it.

I beg you to consider the honor of HaShem and His Torah along with your concern for bigotry against the Jewish people." □

Sincerely,
Roy Neal Grissom, Ben Noach

Are All Religions Correct?

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

Introduction

I wrote this article in very basic English, and quite quickly, as a needed and timely response to someone's opinions. I apologize for the base language used, but the ideas, I feel, are relevant to us all, especially those uninitiated with Judaism's tenets. This paper was written for a specific, young person. He needed to be spoken to in this simple and repetitive manner, in order to drive home very basic points. I start this article writing in response to my last discussed point:

"We discussed whether all religions are "correct". Meaning: Is it correct for a Christian to follow the Christian religion? Is it correct for a Muslim that he follows the Muslim religion? This would also mean that it is not correct for a Christian to follow the Muslim religion. (A problem for a person who converts.)

Let us make our words clear: What makes a person a "Christian" or a "Muslim"? Being born to parents who follow the Christian religion does not make a person Christian. Because, if the child learns of another religion and then chooses to convert, he will not be Christian. Our ideas and our actions after we are born, change us. A person chooses his religion, and being born in his religion can be changed. Religions say it is OK to convert. This means that all religions say how you are born, is not what makes you that religion. We have proved that a person is not born as a "Christian" or as a "Muslim", but he is born as a man or woman. Religion comes later. How a person chooses to live is what makes him, either Christian, Muslim, or any religion. To say, "Who is born Christian should follow Christianity" is not a correct statement. So how should we choose which religion to follow? I will answer this later on.

Another problem is that every religion believes that their religion is the "RIGHT" religion. This means that every person in Christianity believes that Muslim is a wrong religion. Every person of the Muslim religion feels a Christian is wrong for being Christian. This means that each religion says there is only one "RIGHT" religion. If we explain this statement, it means that each religion believes that they have the true religion that G-d wants all people to follow.

Belief is Not Proof. Proof is Superior to Belief.

What explanation do the religions use to prove their positions?

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Religions, other than the Jewish religion, believe the words of a single man, saying that G-d spoke to a single man. For example, Christianity says that Jesus told many other people that G-d said to follow his new religion. Other people say, "what proof do you have that G-d came to you?" Jesus has no proof of his story that G-d spoke to him, so he tells the others, "You must believe me. I have no proof, but believe me that I have heard the word of G-d." So people will believe him, or they won't believe him, as they have no proof to decide not to. This is the story of all other religions - they are created from the words of a single person. Other people who like this new religion follow this person. After many years, this religion grows, until they have millions of followers. This is how Christianity and Muslim and all other religions grew. We see from this example that a religion can become very popular and have millions of followers, even though it is not based on any proof. Does it make sense to follow a religion without any proof? Well, the same question may be asked differently: Shall I trust my body to a doctor if there is no proof for his medicine? This makes no sense. So too, I will not trust my soul to a religion, when the religion has no proof that G-d made it.

Numbers of "Followers" Later on, is No Proof. But Numbers at an "Event" IS a Proof.

It does not matter how many people follow a religion. Numbers of followers later on cannot prove if a religion is true. A "true" religion means that system that G-d really wants people to follow. There must be proof that G-d gave that system. But be clear on this point: Even though numbers of followers is not a proof for the truth of an "idea", numbers can prove an "event" happened. If I see one million people who today are following the Christian religion, this does not prove that original Christian "ideas" are really correct and made by G-d. All it means is that many people

find Christianity appealing. However, if we find an event in history that had many witnesses, then we know 100% that this event really happened. It is impossible that a story with millions of witnesses is false. Any story in history where there were thousands and certainly millions of witnesses AT THAT EVENT, is 100% proof that this event really happened, no matter how long ago it was. Understand this point clearly: Numbers of "followers" later on is not a proof that what they follow really took place. But numbers of people at the original "event" is a proof that that event happened.

As an example, thousands of people met Julius Caesar, so we know for sure that he really existed. A story of Caesar would not have become accepted if he never lived. Nobody would accept or transmit such a story. An additional proof is that there is no other story about the Roman Empire for this time period. This rule is true for all other events in history: any intelligible event attended by masses proves this event happened, beyond doubt.

We Cannot Judge Judaism as False with no Torah Knowledge.

How does a person know if the Jewish religion and the Torah is right or wrong for all people, unless this person studies and comes to a clear understanding? The truth is that without much study, a person cannot know this. Maybe after much study, a person will see that Judaism is the only religion given by G-d. This would mean that G-d wants man to have only one religion, Judaism. But how do we arrive at a proof that one religion is G-d's choice for all people? We already showed that all religions feel that all others are false. So all religions are not all right. Only one can be correct, only one is the real religion that G-d gave man. How do we prove which one it is?

Can we use "proof" to select a religion, or are we not to use proof? Are we just to "feel" what is in our heart, and follow these feelings? Do we always follow what our fathers teach us? Can our fathers be wrong? What if two people feel two

different things in their heart, are they both right? If your father tells you to be free, and my father tells me to follow the Jewish religion, they cannot both be right. Who is right? How do we decide? How do we prove which religion, if any, G-d wants man to follow?

If we say that simple belief is an acceptable way of following G-d - with no proof - then any person can do this. For example, I can tell other people that G-d came to me in a dream and that I have a new religion. Am I any different than Jesus? Why should my religion be any less important than Christianity? Jesus had his religion, and I have mine! So you might say that Jesus made miracles, and I did not. Well, there is no proof for his miracles; there were not hundreds of people that saw any of his supposed miracles. Also, there is no proof that Mohammed flew up to the sky. You see, we need to "prove" which religion is true.

Religion is not a matter of simple belief. It is a matter which like any other story in history, requires a proof if we are to accept it as "100% true". How do we "know" truth? How do we prove which religion G-d gave to man? Also, how do we know that G-d wants one religion to be followed by all people?

Go did not make many types of people, we are all the same. We all have 2 eyes, 1 nose, 1 head, 2 arms and 2 legs. Just like we are all the same in our body, we are also the same in our minds, and in our feelings. All people love, hate, and feel pain when our family members die. We all feel anger when someone lies to us, and most of all, we are all looking for happiness in life. Since all people are of the same design, this means what is good for one person, is good for all of us. All of our bodies, emotions and mentalities are the same.

We know that G-d made all people. Then G-d is the best One to ask direction for what we should do to be happy. If G-d tells us to follow one religion, He certainly knows best, and we would be foolish not to follow Him.

The Proof for Judaism and the Torah.

This is where we come to the proof that G-d gave the Torah to the Jewish nation on Mount Sinai. This event is the only time in all of world history when G-d made miracles in front of millions of people and told us there is one G-d and one religion - Judaism. It is a very simple and clear proof that we know 100% that G-d wants all people to follow the Torah. The story of the miracles G-d did on Mount Sinai in front of millions of Jews is not only believed by Jews, but all Christians also believe this story. Do you know why? Only because so many Jews were telling so many other people, this is why the true story of G-d giving the Torah spread over the whole world. Everybody knows that if the whole world agrees that something in history happened, then, it must be true. It is impossible to make up a story that a mountain was on fire and a voice came from the mountain. If this story were false, no one would believe it! But the story really happened, so this is why everyone there told their children, and they told their grandchildren, and they told theirs, until today! Because so many people were there and saw all of G-d's miracles. G-d made the mountain on fire. The world believes this history happened because the story says so many people were there. This is different from Christianity, which says, "believe" in Jesus. Christianity does not have an event where so many people were there. They have no proof. No other religion has proof.

Now that we know that G-d really gave us His Torah, we must look into it to see what He says will make us happy.

G-d also tells us in His Torah that all other religions are false. G-d says that praying to trees, praying to man, praying to animals, believing in magic, miracles or witchcraft is all false. G-d tells us that anyone who teaches something against Torah is false, and his religion is false. Well, Christians and Muslims teach against G-d's Torah. They must be false. We are not to follow

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any religion except Judaism and Torah. Why did G-d tell us not to follow other religions? G-d said this because G-d knows that He made only one religion. That is all we need forever. G-d knows all of the future, so G-d knows that Torah is good always. One religion called Judaism and Torah has all the right ideas. If someone tells us something different than Torah, then we know he is wrong, because G-d is always right. There is no proof that G-d made the Christian religion or the Muslim religion. Since there is no proof, we do not follow them. But we must know that if G-d made one religion, then only one religion is needed. G-d knows how to put all the important ideas into one religion. G-d does not need more than one religion.

What does it mean to be "good" to other people?

I agree with your idea. It is very important that we are "good" to other people. This is an idea, which the Torah agrees with. The most important thing is that we try to do what is good for other people. We must be interested in the happiness of others, and we are not just interested in ourselves. We are not to be doing always for me, me, me. This is wrong. We must be generous and kind to other people too. We are nice to people no matter what religion they are.

But we must think about this: What does it mean to be "Good"? What does "Good" mean? The reason I say this, is because I read of many people doing different things in their life - but they all feel they are doing what is "Good". But I ask myself, "How can so many people do different things, but all these different things are Good? This does not make sense to me."

For example, many years ago, the Christians killed innocent people during the Crusades. They thought it was good and important and was based on the laws of their Christian religion. But the people they killed did not think it was a good. So who has the "right" idea of what is good? Are the Christians right or are the

families of the dead right? Who can make such a decision? If we say that killing is evil, then I have another question: If for example, a man named "Thomas" is being killed by a man named "Jon", is it right for Thomas to kill Jon to protect himself? These questions make us think that there must be some rules that tell us when killing is bad, and when killing is good. Without rules and a way to decide, we cannot say if Christians are good when they kill, or if they are evil. This is a question not just on Christians, but on any people who kill. We must have some way to know if killing is evil or good for every situation.

Are we to make up our own laws about when it is right to kill, and when it is wrong? This cannot work, because you will come up with one idea and I will come up with a different idea. It is for this reason that we can not just live by a simple rule, "just to be good to everyone." We must first think and learn about what is good.

The truth is, that a man or woman cannot come up with a law for what is "Good". This decision is not possible for us to make. In a discussion of "good and evil", no one person can ever be "more right" than another, and there can never be an end to this question. But now that we proved that G-d exists, and that G-d made every man and woman, and G-d also made the Torah, we have an answer. G-d tells us in His Torah what is good and what is evil. We have a clear explanation. Without the Torah, we cannot know what is good and what is evil. Since G-d made every man and every woman, G-d is the only one with the right to decide when killing is a good, and when it is a bad. If someone wants to kill me, then he is evil, and I can kill him to protect myself. My killing is a good, because G-d said that man could protect himself. When the Christians killed so many people, they were evil, because G-d did not say that to be Christian is good. G-d said that to be Christian is evil, because a Christian will kill

innocent people. The Christian religion has evil in it.

Just Being Good to Everyone is an Evil Thing to do.

Judaism and the Torah say we cannot kill anyone. But if a man wants to kill me and I am not evil, G-d says in the Torah that I can kill him to save my life. When I save my life, I am killing, but it is good to kill him so I can save myself. G-d also teaches us in the Torah that there are people who are so bad, that we must kill them. If we let them live, then they will kill others. So we must kill the bad people to save the good people.

But today, the world says we should not follow the Torah. Today, the world says we cannot kill the Palestinian people. But G-d says that we should, because they kill babies, and little children. So who do we follow? Do we follow the world, and just be nice to people? And then more Jewish babies will die, or do we listen to G-d?

There is a clear set of rules that G-d made and gave to man and woman. G-d calls these rules the Torah. G-d wants man to be able to make a decision that is best for everybody. But man cannot just think for himself what is best. Man needs G-d to teach us what is the real "good." This is why I tell you that we cannot be simple, and think we have all the answers. We do not. We need the Torah that G-d wrote. With the Torah, we know what is good and what is evil. If we do not learn the Torah, we will make very big mistakes, and we will let people live who must really die. And when we let people live who are evil, they

will kill, maybe even our own children. So we must follow what G-d says because He knows what is best for all people.

Some nations free evil people for political reasons. But if we would follow what G-d says in the Torah, we would not let evil people free. When evil people are free, they will kill more Jewish children. Why do evil men go free? Because of politics. This is evil. G-d knows better than leaders, and G-d's Torah says to kill the evil men. But if Sharon wants money from the United States, and he listens to Bush and lets evil people free, Sharon would be evil.

We see that in politics, if we do not listen to G-d, our politics will kill Jewish children. So even in politics, we cannot do anything if we do not use the Torah as our teacher. If we do not follow G-d's Torah, we will cause evil to ourselves. Even politics makes no sense with out G-d's Torah.

The Torah is to help us in every area of our lives.

G-d did not say, "just be nice and good to everyone". Torah is not that simple. Only if we learn the Torah, slowly and with our heart, then we will learn what is true. We will never know the whole Torah! This is not our job. This is too big for us to do. But if we learn a little each week, and even each day, then we will slowly learn what makes sense in every place in our lives. But if we don't listen to G-d's wisdom, then we will live a life with much hurt, and we will not be happy. This is what G-d says in His Torah." □

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PERFECTION VIA LEPROSY

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

The Torah teaches of the punishment of leprosy, or Tzaraas, which visits a person on account of his speaking "Lashon Hara", derogatory remarks concerning another. Leprosy visits the person in stages. At first, leprosy attaches itself to the person's home. If the person heeds the warning and repents, it is gone. If not, it excels towards the person's garments. Again, if one repents, it is gone. If not, it finally attaches to the person's body.

What is the purpose of this progression, and why these objects? Additionally, the Torah states that for one to be atoned, one must bring two birds, one is slaughtered, and its blood is caught in a bowl. The live bird is dipped therein along with a branch of hyssop and myrtle, and the live, bloodied bird is now set free over an open field.

On the surface, this seems barbaric, or at the least, unintelligible. However, as we know G-d is the Designer of the Torah, and "all its ways are pleasant", there must be a rational explanation for these required practices, and for the objects used in attempting to correct the person who spoke viciously.

In order to understand how "mida k'neged mida" (measure for measure) works in this case, we must first understand the crime. Speaking derogatorily against another has at its source, the desire for self-affirmation of one's greatness. An insecure person will usually be found degrading others. In his mind, he now feels higher in comparison to the ridiculed party. A secure individual however, will not concern himself with others, as this doesn't affect his self-estimation. Being secure, another's level has no effect on his status. What then is the remedy for this egomaniac type of personality? To diminish his imagined grandeur with a dose of alienation. Part of the need to elevate oneself is the desire to be loved by others. When this cannot be, as a leper is banished outside the camp of the Israelites, he is faced with the fact that he is not the great image he conjured, and he must eat his words of scorn.

G-d however tries to avoid the worst by hinting to the person that he has done wrong. G-d doesn't send leprosy to the body first. He initially uses other vehicles with which the person identifies, viz., his home, and his clothing. G-d commences with the home, as this is further removed from the person, but related enough to him so as to awaken him. There's something distasteful in him that he should delve into. If the person is obstinate, G-d sends the leprosy to a closer object, his garments. This is more closely tied to one's identity, and is more effective. But if not heeded to, G-d finally delivers leprosy to his body, which is undeniably him. We see from

here G-d's mercy, and intelligence in using objects, which we identify with.

Parenthetically, these three objects, namely the house, clothes and body, are exactly where Mezuza, Tzitzis, and Tefilin abide. These are also tied to the idea of identification, but from a different angle: Since G-d desires that one place their trust in Him, and not in their own strength, G-d created these three commands to redirect where one places their trust. Mezuza reminds one not to invest too much reliance in his home, as G-d should be recognized as the True Protector. The home is correctly viewed as a haven from the elements. But G-d desires that we act above the norm, meaning, that we have trust in His shelter. So we place a reminder on the doorway, which is the best place for us to be reminded of G-d, as a doorway receives most of the activity of a home. We are urged not to place too much importance on our dress, and therefore are commanded to wear tzitzis, fringes. Clothing again is an area where people derive and express their identity. Lastly, but most closely tied to our self-identity are our bodies. One is most affected when something happens to his body, even if no pain is suffered. This is due to our false definition of what "man" is. Society tells us man equals his body. The Torah tells us that man equals intellect. Hence, we are commanded to wear tefilin. A reminder placed on our bodies that we should not invest too much worth here either.

These three, the home, clothes, and body are the three main areas where one identifies, and thus, the three areas where G-d saw it fit to place reminders that G-d alone should be Who we depend on.

Returning to the parsha, what is the idea behind the two birds? I believe that besides correcting the person's flaw of overestimation, he must also realize the damage done to the other. Rashi states that birds in specific are brought, as they chirp, to make clear that the crime had to do with his "chirping" like a bird. The one bird (resembling the sinner) is dipped in the blood of the other bird (resembling the one humiliated by the speech) and let free over a field. This is to demonstrate that just as this bloodied bird is irretrievable, so is his evil, "bloody speech" irretrievable. As you cannot catch the same bird twice, so also he cannot retract his words which were let loose on the world. The damage is done, the "bird is loose". This will hopefully give recognition to the person who spoke destructively and make clear his crime.

The birds acting as atonement teaches that knowing one's sin is the first step to forgiveness. ■