

Intermarriage: Up to 75% – Converts to Christianity: 275,000

Teach your children the fallacy of Christianity and man-made religions, or risk their conversion or intermarriage. Educating them is your best and only recourse.

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Weekly Parsha

Shilach

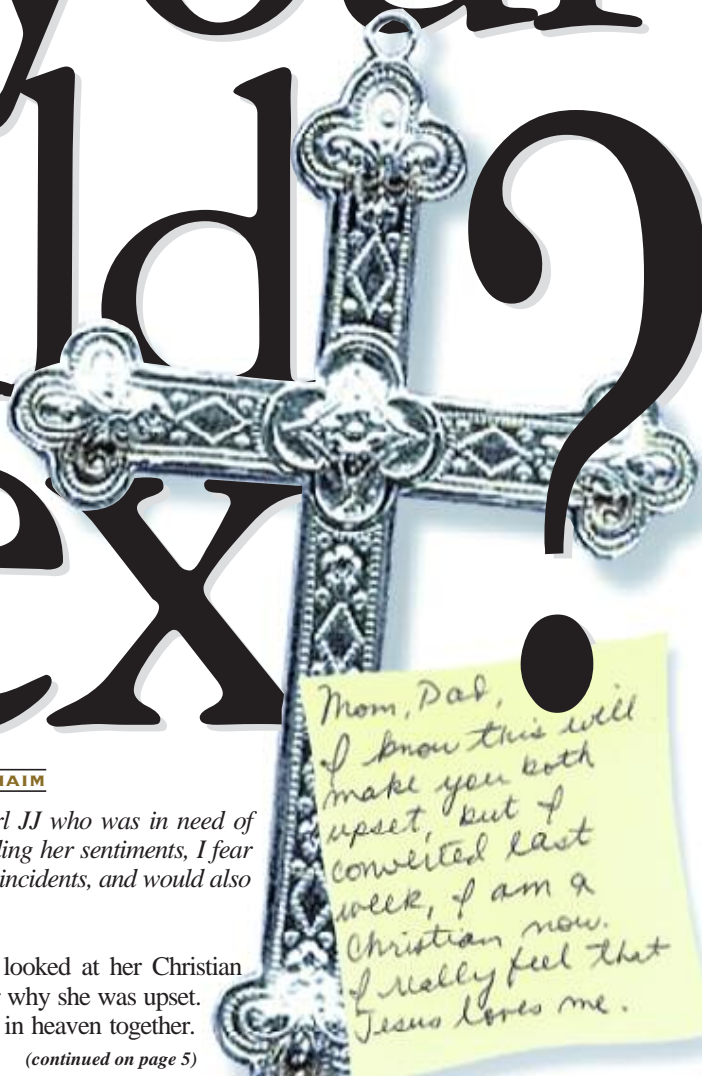
RABBI BERNARD FOX

“Send for you men. And they will scout the land of Canaan that I am giving to Bnai Yisrael. You should send one man from each tribe. Each of them should be a prince.” (BeMidbar 13:2)

Hashem commands Moshe to send scouts into the land of Israel. This

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Is your child next?



RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

A close friend had mentioned a young girl JJ who was in need of some answers about her Judaism. After reading her sentiments, I fear there are many others who have had similar incidents, and would also benefit from the response below.

Taking the elevator together one day, JJ looked at her Christian friend, and saw she looked sad. JJ asked her why she was upset. The latter said to JJ, “I am sad we won’t be in heaven together.

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Mom, Dad,
I know this will
make you both
upset, but I
converted last
week, I am a
Christian now.
I really feel that
Jesus loves me.



The Spies

RABBI ISRAEL CHAIT

Written by student

In order to understand the story of the Meraglim we must first examine the nature and cause of their sin. A careful analysis of the story raises many perplexing questions that demand explanation. A proper appreciation of the story will teach us some very important lessons which can help us in perfecting our own behavior and our relationship with our Creator.

We must first investigate the motivation behind the mission of the Meraglim. Rashi remarks that the mission was initially proposed by Bnei Yisrael. Moshe was ambivalent about this proposition. On the one hand he understood Bnei Yisrael's need to scout the land, but apparently recognized a latent danger in the operation. Moshe was perplexed, and accordingly sought counsel from God. What was Moshe's concern? A strong case could be made that the mission made absolute sense. Judaism demands that a person be proactive and behave in accordance with his intellect. To sit back and expect God to take care of one's needs is a distorted, infantile idea of bitachon – trust in God. True bitachon demands the individual utilize his tzelem Elokim, his mind, to act rationally and to take security only in his recognition of the ultimate reality. The people wanted to know about the land that they were going to conquer. The spies were the nobility of the Jewish people, men of distinction and leaders of the people. They felt that a scouting mission was essential to properly plan an attack. Did not Yehoshua ultimately send scouts prior to entering the land 40 years later? How was the action of the Meraglim any different? What bothered Moshe about this mission and what was the nature of his concern?

In order to identify and properly understand the dangers of the mission we must scrutinize the entire sequence of events. A thorough analysis, based on the comments of Chazal, gives rise to many questions, the resolution of which may help us comprehend the underlying sin of the spies.

The spies, upon returning, reported their findings to the entire Jewish people. One of their conclusions was that Eretz Yisrael was "eret zosheveh," (Bamidbar 13:32) a land that consumes its inhabitants. Rashi explains that the scouts reported that wherever they went they encountered an inordinate number of funerals. This, they felt, reflected the fact that it was a difficult and treacherous land to settle. Rashi explains that the spies failed to perceive the good intent of God's actions. God chose to distract the inhabitants so that they would not pay any heed to the spies, thereby removing any element of danger from the mission. The Gemara in Sotah 35a adds that the residents of the land were at the funeral of Iyov, who protected that generation. Nevertheless the spies did not appreciate this Divine assistance. Calev and Yehoshua, on the other hand, recognized and appreciated this kindness of God. They reported to the people, "sar tzelem me'aleihem" (ibid. 14:9) God has removed his shade, his protection, from the peoples of the land. Rashi tells us that Calev and Yehoshua were referring to Iyov, their protector, whom God had killed. As such, the inhabitants of the land were now vulnerable to being destroyed.

We must pause and ask: what do the Gemara and Rashi mean? Are they positing that Iyov lived at this time? Furthermore, why were the other spies so blinded to God's helpful hand?

After reporting their findings the spies rallied the people and incited them to complain against Moshe and Aharon. The people said, "let us appoint a

new leader to and return to Egypt" (ibid. 14:4). The Gemara in Sanhedrin 107b states that the language of, "nitnah rosh – appoint us a leader" is "lashon avodah zarah – an expression that connotes idolatry." This comment is difficult to understand. What is the connection between Bnei Yisrael's fear of entering the land and idolatry?

Calev and Yehoshua did not participate in the sin of the other spies. In order to help us understand the ramifications of the sin we must first analyze the behavior of Calev and Yehoshua to understand why they didn't participate. The Gemara in Sotah 34b tells us that Calev went to kivrei Avot – the graves of his forefathers – in order to plead for God to have mercy on him. The Baalei Tosafot cite the Gemara in Brachos 18a which states that the dead lack knowledge of worldly events. If that is the case, the Baalei Tosafot ask, what was the intent of Calev in visiting their graves? How could such a visit possibly help Calev in asking for mercy from God? Furthermore, what was the intent of Calev in asking for mercy and what did this have to do with not succumbing to the advice of the spies? The Gemara also tells us that Yehoshua did not join Calev in his journey to kivrei Avot because Moshe had already sought God's compassion on his behalf when he changed his name from Hoshea to Yehoshua. This was done so that God would save him from the bad counsel of the spies. How does a name change or a visit to a cemetery protect one from becoming falling into a bad crowd?

The question that is most basic to the whole story is: why were the spies and the rest of the nation terrified about attacking the inhabitants of the land? Where was their trust in God? As God asked Moshe, "How long will [this nation continue] not to have faith in Me, despite all the signs I have performed in its midst?" (ibid. 14:11). This nation witnessed the most miraculous of plagues and watched as most powerful nation in the world was rendered powerless. This nation observed the total annihilation of the Egyptians at the splitting of the Red Sea as they marched through walls of flowing water. This was nation that God personally brought out of Egypt and sheltered and sustained in the wilderness. What could possibly cause them to suddenly question God's ability to lead them into the Promised Land? Could they have doubted His ability to protect them? Such a possibility seems absurd.

In order to answer these questions we must first understand the state of mind of the Jewish people at this fateful time in history. The Gemara in Sotah 34b states that we have a tradition that the names of the various spies allude to their actions. "Setur ben Michael" was so named because "setur ma'asav shel haKadosh Baruch Hu," he distorted the actions of God. His father's name connotes "mach E-I," he portrayed God as weak. Rashi explains that his hatred of God caused him to lie in his report. He portrayed God as weak by comparing Him to a homeowner who is unable remove his furniture from his house, the underlying accusation being that God is unable to drive the inhabitants out of the land. "Nachvi ben Vofsi" was named because "hechvi d'varav shel Hashem," he concealed the words of God." His father's name alludes to "pise'ah al midotav," he ignored God's attributes. Rashi explains that he concealed things by not reporting things the way he actually observed them. He also ignored the good things that God did for Bnei Yisrael by not reporting them accurately, for example, by

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The Spies

RABBI ISRAEL CHAIT

Written by student

reporting that the land consumed its inhabitants and giving Bnei Yisrael impression that the land was undesirable and impossible to conquer. He distorted and concealed the fact that God caused these deaths in order to prevent their destruction.

An analysis of the Gemara poses several considerable difficulties. What does it mean that the spies' hatred of God made them liars? Why would these spies hate God? At the inception of the mission they were considered ha'sarim – the leaders. These were individuals that personally experienced the great beneficence of the Creator. How could such noble individuals stoop to the base level of lying about the God Who took them out of Egypt? What was the cause of this behavior?

The Gemara, by citing the tradition that the spies' names allude to their actions, provides great insight into the nature of the spies' sin. This Gemara sheds light on the psychological underpinnings of the actions of the spies. These men were faced with an internal conflict. On the one hand they were the nobility, the leaders and guides of the nation. But at the same time they, like all of Bnei Yisrael, had all of their needs provided for by God. He liberated them from slavery, defeated their masters, protected them in the wilderness, and presently led them into their new homeland. Consequently these leaders felt impotent. They felt as though they, the would-be leaders of the Jewish people, had no role in their salvation. With this underlying, unconscious motivation, the leaders roused the people to demand that Moshe send spies to scout out the land. They did in order to play an active role in the process of entering the land, thereby satisfying their need to feel proactive and important. Moshe was cognizant of this psychological need but was caught in a dilemma. On the one hand he recognized that this request was a deviation from the God's set course of action, for God had not commanded Moshe to send the spies. On the other hand he recognized that were he to deny Bnei Yisrael's request their feelings of inadequacy would only intensify, generating feelings of resentment and possibly rebelliousness. After consulting with God, who left the decision up to Moshe, he reluctantly agreed to send spies in an attempt to satisfy the psychological need of the people and the leaders in a healthy manner. The Gemara in Sotah is informing us of the psychological mindset of the spies. Obviously they didn't hate God. However, they resented the fact that God did everything for them, especially since they were supposed to be the leaders of the people. Their pride would not allow them to accept the fact the state of being completely passive and powerless. It is this unconscious resentment that the Gemara refers to as "hatred" of God. It was this resentment which caused the spies to be terrified upon seeing the mighty inhabitants of the land. Rather than attributing this reaction to their own failings, their inability to confront their own inadequacy led them to project their weakness onto God, comparing Him to a homeowner who is unable to move his furniture. Unconsciously, they could not tolerate the notion that God would have to take care of them again because they were totally helpless.

But the question still remains: how did this resentment prevent them from recognizing and appreciating all of the good that God had and continued to do for them? Why did they unconsciously project their own weakness onto

God and blind them to the display of providence they had been subject to thus far?

An understanding of the Klal Yisrael's response to the spies' report is quite revealing. They did not to cry out to God to assist them in conquering the inhabitants nor did they demand that Moshe explain God's actions. Rather their immediate reaction was, "appoint us a leader and we will return to Egypt" (ibid. 14:4). Our Sages teach us that this reaction stemmed from an idolatrous emotion. Bnei Yisrael viewed God as a Father in heaven Who took care of their every need because they were special. All of the miracles, care, and sustenance provided to them throughout the Exodus caused them to feel like spoiled children. They failed to recognize the mission with which they were charged at Sinai, that they were chosen to act as a moral light unto the world. They were destined to enter the land of Israel, not because God wanted to fulfill their desires, but in order to live at the highest spiritual and intellectual level and serve as a role model for the nations of the world, causing them to exclaim "surely a wise and discerning people is this great nation" (Devarim 4:6). It was only because of this mission that God watched over them and supervised them. God's providence functioned solely for the purpose of enabling them to achieve spiritual perfection. However, like rebellious children, they could not tolerate the fact that God had to take care of all their needs. They could not tolerate this because the idolatrous emotion pervaded their relationship with God. They acted as though God existed for the sole purpose of caring for their needs as helpless children. The hatred the Gemara describes is the unconscious resentment that a child encounters when he realizes his own inadequacies. The child cannot tolerate his total dependence on the parent. That is why there is no answer to God's rhetorical question to Moshe, "How long will [this nation continue] not to have faith in Me, despite all the signs I have performed in its midst?" (Bamidbar 14:11). It is interesting to note that the word "b'tocho," "in their midst," is used instead of a word indicating that the miracles were done for them. The reason why God wanted to destroy them at this point in time is that the people had totally corrupted themselves and their mission by adopting this selfish view of their relationship with Him.

We can now also understand Chazal's interpretation of Calev and Yehoshua's response to the accusation of "it is a land that consumes its inhabitants." They responded by assuring the people that, "God removed the protection of the inhabitants." Chazal state that this refers to Iyov who had died and was the protector and strength for the inhabitants of the land. Chazal are again underscoring the basic sin of the Meraglim. Iyov typified a person whose experience taught him the proper perspective of one's relationship with the Creator. God does not exist merely to help a person fulfill his desires. His providence is based upon man's perfection as a spiritual being. The spies totally misconstrued the events they witnessed in the land of Israel in the same fashion, which distorted their entire relationship with God.

Yehoshua and Calev did not participate in the sin of the Meraglim but instead gave an accurate description of what they witnessed. They told the people not to worry about the inhabitants of the land, assuring them that God would destroy them and allow Bnei Yisrael to enter the land. They were aware of the true character of Bnei Yisrael's mission and their relationship

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The Spies

RABBI ISRAEL CHAIT

Written by student

with God. Yehoshua and Calev were capable of maintaining their security in this relationship and were not overwhelmed by the hysteria of the other spies. Moshe changed Yehoshua's name. By adding the name of God, "Yehoshua," he told Yehoshua that God would save him from the bad counsel of the Meraglim. Moshe was a rebbi to Yehoshua, a teacher and guide. He recognized the dangerous attitude of the other spies and warned his pupil. As Chazal tell us, the act of changing Yehoshua's name was a way of requesting compassion from God. Compassion from God is evoked when man realizes that his sins result from the frailties of the human condition. He seeks God's guidance to give him the opportunity and ability to act in accordance with his tzelem Elokim – his intellect, that which allows him to approach God. By changing his name Moshe secured this message, ensuring that Yehoshua would constantly remain aware of the dangers and maintained steadfast in his relationship with God. Our Sages tell us that Calev had to go out to kivrei avot – the graves of his forefathers – to seek compassion. He was not Moshe's main disciple and Moshe was not his personal rebbi, as he was to Yehoshua. Calev recognized the dangers of his mission and he went to kivrei avot. He sought inspiration from Avraham, Yitzchak, and Yaakov, the great forefathers of our nation, men who had the proper perspective of man's relationship with God. The Avot symbolized the mission and destiny of Bnei Yisrael, for they were the origin and cause of our existence as the chosen people. Tosafos is accurate in pointing out that the dead are unaware of worldly events, however, Calev desired that the Avot be a source of compassion for him in a different sense. They were his teachers. They had the proper perspective of the Jewish people's relationship with God and their destiny. At this critical time, as the Jewish people were entering into the promised land, Calev sought inspiration from the fathers and mothers of our nation to save him from the negative influence of his peers. He sought God's compassion because he recognized the frailty of man and sought and resolved to resist those weaknesses. The Torah teaches us that Calev retained his strength of character because he had a "ruach acheret," a different spirit than the others. Calev possessed the true "ruach Elokim," the true spirit which is line with God's will.

Upon hearing the distorted report of the spies, the people did not discount the strength of the inhabitants. They failed to recognize that God would destroy their enemies and allow them to enter to the land to achieve their destiny. On the contrary, "vayivku – and they cried," Bnei Yisrael cried like helpless children. They were incapable of taking security in their relationship with their Creator. Chazal teach us that God responded by stating that they were crying for no reason and responded by promising, "I will give them reason to cry." That night was Tisha b'Av, a day indelibly etched into the calendar of our people as a day of tragedy. Tisha b'Av represents hester panim – the total concealment of God's special providence for the Jewish people. Throughout the generations Bnei Yisrael would mourn on Tisha b'Av, a day which reflects the distance between God and His chosen people. The Meraglim lacked the proper perspective of the relationship between God and Klal Yisrael. They failed to recognize their true mission. This resulted in distancing the Jewish people from God, establishing a chasm which will only be bridged in the Messianic Era. In the end of days, Bnei Yisrael will

again cleave to God, with the proper perspective of their mission, and then will be worthy of being a moral light unto the world.

Another reflection of God's justice as being midda k'neged midda – measure for measure – was Klal Yisrael's punishment for sympathizing with the Meraglim. Those alive at the time were incapable of entering into Eretz Yisrael. Their relationship with God was marred by the idolatrous notion that they were special and that God would take care of them as helpless children. They did not appreciate the true character of their relationship with the Creator and were thus incapable of entering into the land. This generation had to do Teshuva and totally reappraise their role as the Chosen Nation. What was their punishment? They had to dig their own graves and lie down in them, not knowing who would get up again. This was not a cruel or unusual punishment. It was midda k'neged midda. It allowed Klal Yisrael to reflect upon their relationship with God. God was not there simply to take care of their needs. God is the Borei Olam – the Creator of the world and source of all reality, as Iyov had recognized. Only by facing their own mortality as emanating from the Borei Olam could their idolatrous notions be shattered.

The entire story of the Meraglim is followed by a strange sequence of events. It tells us of a group of Jews, the mapilim, who immediately after God ravaged the spies with the plague attempted to enter into Israel. What were they thinking? Had they not personally witnessed God's punishment of the spies? Did they fail to recognize that they were not worthy of entering the land? The Torah teaches us that Moshe and the Ark of God did not budge as this group attempted to proceed into Eretz Yisrael. However, these people persisted, "v'yapilu la'alot el rosh ha'har – but they were stubborn [and proceeded] to ascend to the mountaintop" (ibid. 14:44). Rashi tells us that "v'yapilu – and they were stubborn" is "lashon choshech," an expression connoting darkness. Alternatively, Rashi suggests it is a language of azut – audacity. These people were still in the dark. They failed to perceive the true sin of the Meraglim and the character of their relationship with God. They were audacious and arrogant. They felt they were punished because they simply doubted God. They were like children, incapable of recognizing reality and persistent in achieving a goal beyond their grasp. They felt that God would take care of them simply because they were special. This was azut, arrogance. They felt that the Meraglim were punished because they doubted God but felt that God was on their side. They felt that they were capable of entering the land. Moshe and the Ark of God did not budge. Moshe recognized that these people were doomed to failure. The Ark of God also did not budge. This represented that they were not worthy of God's intervention. The failure of the Meraglim was a failure of the greatest degree. It went to the core of their very existence as a nation and demanded a generation of time to cure. These people still suffered from the same malady. They were not worthy of God's providence and they were totally destroyed.

A careful analysis of the story of the Meraglim affords us an excellent opportunity to reflect upon our relationship with God as the Chosen Nation. It is only when we have a proper perspective of our relationship with the Borei Olam and rid ourselves of any idolatrous notions can we be worthy of redemption.

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Being Jewish, you are destined to be in hell.” The Christian girl proceeded to cite Biblical passages in support of her claim. JJ had attended a school that was 80% Jewish, but no one - before this Christian friend - made her question her Jewish identity. Later JJ pondered, “What does it mean to be Jewish? Do I end up in hell or not?”

We cannot fully appreciate what disturbing feelings JJ must have experienced. How does a teenage girl deal with such issues?

What is certain is that her schooling did not provide her with a solid foundation in basic, Judaic tenets. Of course, no school can cover every idea during a student’s four-year term, but why do not schools equip Jewish students with a basic knowledge of the flaws of all other religions, and the knowledge of how to respond? Are they playing politics? Are there non-Jewish secular studies teachers who might be offended at such classes? What must win out, politics, or preventing our children from leaving Judaism? The answer is obvious to me, but evidently, those running our Jewish schools have not yet come to terms with this issue.

What might be some initial words to help JJ and others appreciate the basics of her Jewish identity, and arrive at solid answers? We cannot answer every specific question, but perhaps some general rules can help. To JJ and others I say, “Be mindful, and be firm, you are seeking ‘proven truths’, and you must not relent from questioning anybody until they have proven their point beyond any doubt, or until you have shown their error. You need not be a genius to see through the false religions, and I don’t suggest you initiate a debate. But if approached by other religionists, the following are some rules of argumentation will help to expose falsehoods”:

1) Request Rationale – When you hear other religious views, request those speaking to validate their statements with clear reason. When they cannot, their own words will testify to their foolish beliefs. Other religions will attempt to claim either, 1) events that took place, or 2) that a certain belief is a good belief. With no or few ‘witnesses’ in their written stories, an event is not proven to have occurred. So we don’t accept it. And when they try to suggest a belief is a good, ask them, “how is this good for me?”. When they suggest an answer, ask them for proof. Here’s an example:

Christian: You should be Christian.

You: Why?

Christian: It is better for you.

You: How?

Christian: Jesus will forgive your sins.

You: How will he do this, he is dead? I thought G-d is the one who forgives?

Christian: Just believe.

You: Why should I believe this and not Judaism?

Christian: Because you will burn in hell.

You: So is it because its better, or to avoid burning?

Christian: Both.

You: Prove it.

Christian: I cannot prove it - you just have to believe. Faith is better than proof.

You: Do you ask your boss for proof that he will pay you, or would you work with no contract?

Christian: I’d want a contract, maybe he will stiff me, and

I’ll work all week and have no proof he owes me money.

You: But your religion is less important?

Christian: No.

You: But you don’t seek proof for your religion. You contradicted your very principle.

Christian: You’re twisting my words.

You: But you said belief is better, and then you said it isn’t, it seems you are twisting your own words. And what if want to believe in Judaism? Why is that “belief” worse than belief in Jesus? Without an explanation, you are without a reason for being Christian. You should really deny Jesus, G-d will forgive your sins! He was a false prophet, and your own Bible says a false prophet deserves death.

At this point, the Christian has a problem. He uses conflicting rules. A great tool for learning how to argue is to study Talmud. Regardless of your level of religiosity, you must learn to think clearly, and Talmud will help you. Ask your school to create a class, or find a teacher.

Lesson #1: Stay focused on demanding rationale; don’t let the conversation move off of this.

2) Reason Rules – If some idea you hear does not conform to reason, it is false. Reason Rules! Make sure you see clearly where they are following some notion without proof. When you understand they have no proof, you will not be impressed.

Lesson #2: When you don’t hear a rational explanation for believing in the dead Jesus, and you won’t, dismiss all they say. We don’t live based on blind faith, that’s foolish.

3) Fact Focusing – As your conversation proceeds, you must focus on the facts, and do not forget what the other party said 5 minutes ago. You will find, many times, that to defend themselves, they will change their mind. You must show them they have done so if you are to expose their error. In such a manner, the other person will refute himself, as he abandoned his first line of reasoning. This is proof that his first argument failed. Continue in this fashion as you discuss further.

Lesson #3: Make the Christian stick to a given point until he has no way to prove himself. Don’t let him or her move to another point. Forcing them to remain on one subject, and demanding reason for their arguments will expose their irrational positions.

4) Argue the Abstract- A Rabbi offered a good suggestion: don’t debate verses. Christians and others can quote very well. What you should debate are his principles, such as faith, man-god, reward and punishment, and Trinity. Whenever he tries to steer you into a particular, abstract the premise he is working on and refute it, and in this manner he will eventually come to realize that the strategy of citing verses will not bear fruit.

Lesson #4: Don’t allow them to get you confused over numerous verses, make them state a philosophical position, and then force them to show proof. They cannot, and you will see their positions are nonsense.

5) Fearing Frowns – One issue that might get your gut, is that maybe you will upset another person when you ask so

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many times that they prove themselves. They will frown at your determination, and maybe even get angry, but this must not shake your determination. In fact, it should assure you that you are following a good line of questioning: as they have no rationale for their position, they revert to anger. Anger is a sign of defeat. If you desire truth, you must stand firm.

Lesson #5: Don't allow your emotions to interfere.

6) Blind Belief - Do not accept the opinion, "you just have to believe". Since you desire truth, and belief does not prove something as true, belief is not an acceptable argument in their defense. This alone will disarm most of their statements. Your viewpoint should be that of consistency: "All else in the world follows provable and rational laws, such as math, science, and justice. Religion, which is even more important, should certainly be based on what makes sense." If they say that blind faith is better, ask them to 'prove it'. If they attempt to give you a reason, then you say, "Aha, you are trying to use REASON, to prove faith. You therefore agree that reason IS superior."

Lesson #6: Whenever you hear them say "believe", repeat yourself: "I don't believe anything. The world operates by reason. Prove it - or do not waste my time."

7) Popular isn't Proof - Although other religions have attracted more numbers than Judaism, do not be misled into thinking, "if so many follow it, it must be true." Numbers of followers do not make their religion any truer. If one million people say it is good to kill innocent people, is their view any more correct, than if only one person said it? Numbers prove nothing other than how emotionally attractive a belief is. Christianity allows you to feel guilt free, that Jesus died for your sins. This is a reason for its popularity. But such a position is nonsense, as it is not based on proof or reason, and it also goes against G-d's Torah. "Each man in his OWN sin will die." To say Jesus died for other people is a direct contradiction to G-d's very words. It is also simply unjust to kill John, if Jack was the evil person! Reason will steer you towards what is true.

Lesson #7: Mass believers prove nothing.

8) Written Words - Humpty Dumpty. That's all you need to remember for this one. What I mean is that just because

you find a belief, or a religion in print, this has no bearing on its truth. Humpty Dumpty is also found in books. If something is true, it does not matter if it is written or not. I can be in traffic today, and that's true, even though it's not written. When I write it, it doesn't make it truer. And if I was not in traffic, and I write that I was, again, writing does not change what actually happened. Don't be impressed with religious books, ideas, or beliefs. Follow reason.

Lesson #8: Written words can also be lies.

9) Age & Authenticity - Many people feel if they find something really old, and there are inscriptions on it, then the words are true. But you must ask yourself, "Aren't fictional stories and fables like the Greek gods all false?" So you see, age does not make a story authentic and true. Again, use your right to question and force others to prove their positions. You will see that they cannot. And when they fail to prove their point, that's it. You need not prove anything. If they failed to prove their position, then you don't have to accept it. And don't feel obligated to prove your position. Your goal was to show them as false, and you did. Don't get suckered into their arguments like, "Well, I may be wrong but how do YOU prove YOUR position?" Just because you can't right now, this does not make them right. They do this often as a method to defend their crushed egos, so be on guard.

Lesson #9: Just as there are old idols, and they are false, so too there are very old histories and books. Age cannot prove a point as true.

10) Rehearse Refutations - When you see you have lodged a question against another religious belief, and they cannot respond, make note of your new knowledge. You will help others with your reasoning. The Talmud goes so far to teach that we must know responses to other religions, and not fumble in our responses. Rashi teaches that we are to learn the other religions to teach our children what is false.

Lesson #10: Commit your newly gained knowledge to memory, and teach others the truth of Judaism, and that all other religions are not based on any proof or true ideas.

When is something "proven"? Let us first itemize what is subject to proof: there are 1) events, and there are 2) ideas.

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"How many of you could successfully disprove a Christian? Could you prove why Christianity is false and how Judaism G-d's only word? If you answer "no", then consider this: your child is less knowledgeable than you, and has less confidence. He or she is most certainly subject to the emotionally, compelling arguments of professional, Christian proselytizers, and everyday Christians they will meet in life."

(Is Your Child Next continued from previous page)

That is, there are physical things and occurrences, and there are non-physical things. All else falls under one of these headings. How may we prove that an event truly took place? Witnesses of easily comprehensible phenomenon prove an event. Sinai included millions witnessing a mountain ablaze. People know what mountain is and they know what fire is. And if the story describes masses at such an event, it must have happened. How else could the story reach us today as truth? Sinai contained both - masses, and comprehensible miracles. Another example of provable events would be the existence of Caesar. Although no one alive today ever met him, we know that stories about him could not have been accepted the world over, had they never existed.

But how do we prove if a belief is true or false, or if a religious belief is true? Observing the natural world and the universe can help you arrive at many truths, like the idea that there is a Creator: we realize that something cannot create itself, so something else (G-d) must be responsible for its existence. With such reasoning, we may arrive at many truths. Abraham is the prime example of how even someone steeped in idolatry, when examining the universe, can arrive at truths about G-d. Asking questions, and discussing issues with learned people is essential to our growth. But since G-d gave us the Torah, as proven by His miraculous Revelation at Sinai, we have a great tool, provided by the Creator. As all truth is based on what He did, and as He created everything, we have an exact science that determines truths for us – it is the Torah. With Torah, we also learn what is considered “evil” and “good”. Without learning from the Creator of life whether murder is an evil, we really don’t know when we should or shouldn’t kill. It is only through our realization that a Creator made life, that we can say what is truly right, and what is wrong. Without studying the Torah, we are almost assured a distorted view of the correct morality. With the Torah, so many truths are revealed to us, that we could never come to on our own. Torah study is indispensable if we are to know for certain; is there a hell, is there a heaven? Are the Christians right, or are we? How do I know there is a G-d? Why do I need to follow so many laws? Commence your studies immediately.

What must happen is that Jewish schools start teaching the flaws of the other major religions, while teaching the rationale of Judaism, and the fundamental tenets of our G-d-given law. There are so many essential resources readily available, that it is a crime if other considerations prevent such study and teaching. If such classes are not implemented, by what means do you think Jewish students will remain Jewish? Many Jews already convert and intermarry...for no excusable reason. It is worth the scorn of secular studies teachers and others, to make such classes mandatory. We must teach our children and students the basic flaws in Jews for Jesus, Christian proselytizers, idolatrous principles, and all other fallacy. This is not an option.

Some Alarming Statistics

• Intermarriage:

Orthodox: 3%
Conservative: 37%
Reform: 53%
Unaffiliated: 72%

• 52 percent of Jews do NOT believe in God.

• Over the past decade there has been an alarming increase in the influence of evangelical Christianity. This growth has been accompanied by an astonishing increase in Christian missionary activities, which target Jews for conversion.

• The annual budget for one such missionary group, "Jews for Jesus," is over \$12 million.

• Well over 1,000 missionary groups, which actively work to convert Jews worldwide, spend over \$250 million each year on their efforts. They sponsor hundreds of full-time missionaries, as well as television and radio programs, and have created over 400 "Messianic synagogues," which strive to appear Jewish but are, in fact, Christian.

• Most authorities say that there are over 275,000 Jewish converts to "Hebrew Christianity" worldwide.

Everyone, in some manner, is connected to a school, a student, or a child. Standing by idly will guarantee more Jews leaving Judaism. Do something. Demand that your schools initiate classes on this vital issue. Failure to address this issue is both foolish and deadly. There are many articles on our site that you may use for this important purpose. You need not contact us for permission; use the "Search" feature on www.Mesora.org to locate articles by keywords. If you fail to find an article addressing any topic in specific, please write us at: mesora@mesora.org

We will endeavor to assist you.

Do not think that we have overly dramatized this concern. For how many of you - parents and teachers reading right now - could successfully disprove a Christian who approaches you? Could you prove to him exactly why Christianity is false and an evil, and how Judaism is the only correct religion and G-d's only word to man? Well, if your honest answer is "no", then consider this: your child is less knowledgeable than you, and has less confidence. He or she is most certainly subject to the emotionally, compelling arguments of professional, Christian proselytizers, or even everyday Christians they will invariably meet in life. And the numbers of Christians proves just how attractive their religion is.

And not only in confrontation with Christians is there a danger. The greater danger is when young Jewish adults ponder their religion on their own. Teenagers are at the most delicate and instable period of human life, where social approval and self-image are their primary concerns. Combine this with questions that will arise in their heads about why Judaism is better than other religions, and you have a volatile mixture. The only way to insure your child's unwavering commitment to Judaism is to teach them yourself, or make certain your schools equip them with solid answers. There is something you can do, right now.

Don't allow your child to be next. ■

Taken from "Getting It Straight", Practical Ideas for a Life of Clarity

Anger

DOUG TAYLOR AND RABBI MORTON MOSKOWITZ

"You could have been killed."

His tone was even as we walked past the Mukilteo Lighthouse toward the beach. He wasn't accusing or reprimanding, just stating a fact. His comment heightened my own realization of how dangerous the encounter had been.

The King of Rational Thought and I had been talking about human action; why people behave as they do. "You have two things," he had said, "your intellect and your emotions. The big question is: which one do you use to make your decisions?"

To my surprise, he had added, "Most people operate from their emotions."

At first, I hadn't bought it. But then I had remembered The Incident.

My friend Pete and his pregnant wife were driving along Highway 410 to Yakima. I was along for the ride.

A few miles outside of Cliffdell, Pete decided to pass the car in front of us. He waited for a straight stretch on the two-lane highway, pulled out into the left lane, and sped up to pass.

The other car sped up too.

Pete sped up even more. So did the other car.

By the time Pete reached 75 miles an hour, it was clear that the other car was not going to let him by. Pete slowed back down and pulled in behind the other driver.

Pete didn't seem angry. But he was troubled. Why would someone purposely risk another person's life for no apparent reason? He decided to find out.

The car ahead of us pulled into a driveway about ten minutes later. Pete pulled off to the side of the road, calmly got out, and walked toward the other car.

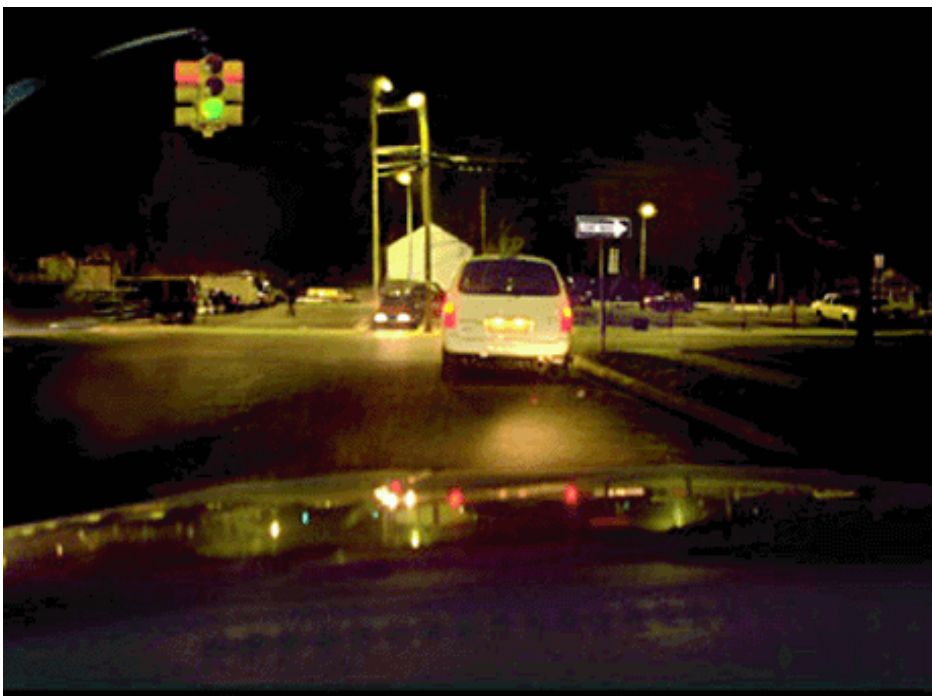
Before Pete even got close, the driver jumped out and started swearing at him. "You #@\$ &#%\$@! What do you think you were doing?!! You were climbing all over my tail!!!"

Another man got out of the passenger side of the car, moved to within inches of Pete, and said menacingly, "Get back in your car and get out of here."

Pete stayed calm. "I wanted to know," he said quietly, "why you tried to kill me back there."

"You were tailgating me for miles," the other driver responded angrily. "You made me so mad it was the only thing I could do."

I could hardly believe my ears. I'd just heard a rationale for vehicular



homicide.

"Get back in your car and get out of here," the other man repeated. He was obviously spoiling for a fight.

After trying to reason with both men, Pete finally realized the situation was deteriorating. He gave it up and walked away.

"Next time we'll run you off the road!" the passenger shouted as Pete got back into our car.

"It's a classic case," said the King of Rational Thought after I had finished telling him the story. "Emotions lead. Head and body follow."

"Do you think Pete did the right thing?" I asked.

He smiled. "If people are coming from their emotions, and you try to beat them with an intellectual argument, do you think they'll suddenly abandon their emotions and admit, 'yes, I'm wrong'?"

I realized it sounded rather foolish when he put it that way. "So what should Pete have done?"

"Either let it go or called 911," he replied. "As it was, he took on a losing situation and put you, his wife, and an unborn child in needless jeopardy."

I didn't say any more. I knew him to be an insightful man.

And I was hoping he hadn't guessed that Pete was me. ■

Parshas Shelach

RABBI BERNARD FOX

group will travel through the land and return with a report.

These scouts return and deliver their report. They assert that Bnai Yisrael will not be able to conquer the inhabitants of Canaan. This report causes panic within the nation. Bnai Yisrael refuse to proceed.

Hashem punishes Bnai Yisrael. He decrees that the people will wander in the wilderness for forty years. The current generation will not conquer the land. Their children will possess the land of Israel.

In Sefer Devarim, Moshe reviews this incident. He adds some crucial information. The suggestion of sending this advance party originated from Bnai Yisrael. The people approached Moshe. Moshe received permission from Hashem to authorize the mission.[1]

Nachmanides raises an interesting question. What was the mission of these scouts? In Sefer Devarim, the people address this issue. They explain that the scouts will determine the best approach to the land. They will evaluate which cities should be first attacked first.[2] In other words, these scouts were to act as spies.

However, when Moshe charged the spies he expanded their mission. In addition to military information, they were to report on the fertility and quality of the land.[3] Why did Moshe make this change?

Nachmanides explains that Moshe knew that the spies would discover a rich and fertile land. He expected that they would report this finding to the nation. This would thrill the people. They would be eager to proceed with the conquest.[4]

This insight does not completely explain Moshe's motives. Why did Moshe feel that this additional encouragement was necessary? Moshe had not originally intended to send these scouts. Bnai Yisrael suggested dispatching spies. How did this suggestion convince Moshe that the nation required reassurance?

Nachmanides' comments provide an interesting insight into the entire incident. Moshe apparently, concluded that the request to send spies was motivated by insecurity. He knew that the spies would report that the land was occupied by mighty nations. The inhabitants lived in fortified cities. This information would add to Bnai Yisrael's fears. Moshe sought to counter these concerns. He expanded the spy's mission. This assured that they would also bring back a

favorable assessment of the quality of the land of Israel. He hoped that the resultant enthusiasm would help Bnai Yisrael overcome their fears.

"These are the names of the people that Moshe sent to scout the land. And Moshe called Hoshea bin Nun Yehoshua." (BeMidbar 13:16)

Moshe realized that the spies he had appointed were not completely suited for their mission. They lacked the confidence and self-assurance essential to conquest. He suspected that they would be intimidated and foresaw their discouraging report. He renamed his student Hoshea. He bestowed upon him the name Yehoshua. This new name contained Moshe's prayer on his behalf. Hashem should rescue Yehoshua from the influence of the spies.

We can easily understand Moshe's prayers on his student's behalf. However, the alteration of Yehoshua's name is more difficult to explain. Why did Moshe change his student's name? What purpose was served by this change?

Maimonides explains in his Laws of Repentance that there are various behaviors that are associated with repentance. One of these is that the repentant individual changes his name. In adopting a new name, the repentant person is making a statement. He is a new person. He is not the one who committed the sins from which he repents.[5] This is not merely some sort of superficial gesture. Repentance requires a recreation of oneself. One must leave previous modes of behavior and thought and adopt a new life-style. The adoption of a new name encourages the development of a fresh self-image. This self-image is an invaluable asset in the attempt to build a new life. The important element of this analysis is that a person's name can communicate a personal message. It is an effective vehicle for reminding its owner of one's personal mission and identity.

We can apply Maimonides' reasoning to Moshe's change of Hoshea's name. Moshe realized that his prayers might not be sufficient to save his student. His student must be reminded of the danger that surrounds him. He must appreciate this danger. He must also recognize his personal mission. This mission is to resist this influence and remain unsullied by the sins of the

other spies. Moshe provided his student with a device designed to communicate all of these messages. This was his new name. This new name was designed to communicate a personal message. The new name recalled to its bearer Moshe's prayers and the reason for these prayers.

"Is the land fertile or barren? Are there trees there or not? And be courageous and take some of the fruit of the land. And it was during the period of the ripening of the first grapes." (BeMidbar 13:20)

Moshe provides the spies with instructions. Our passage is part of these instructions. One of the directives Moshe gives the spies is to bring back a sample of the fruit of the land.

Why did Moshe require the scouts to bring back this sample of the fruit? The most obvious answer is that he wished to provide a concrete sample of the fertility of the land. Hashem had told Moshe that the land was fertile. Moshe was sure that the fruit would demonstrate this fertility. Therefore, he asked the scouts to bring back a sample of the fruit.

There is another possible explanation for Moshe's instruction to bring back a sample of the fruit. This answer requires an introduction. There is an interesting detail in our parasha that deserves some analysis. The Torah specifies that the scouts were sent from the wilderness of Paran.[6] This comment seems redundant. At the end of the previous parasha, the Torah tells us that the nation was camped in the wilderness of Paran.[7] It is obvious that the spies were sent from this location.

There seems to be a second redundancy in the same passage. The pasuk states that the scouts were sent from the wilderness of Paran "at the word of Hashem." [8] The mention of Hashem's acquiescence seems to be a second redundancy. The parasha begins with the Almighty granting permission to send the spies!

Rav Yitzchak Zev Soloveitchik Ztl suggests that the explanation for these apparent redundancies can be found in the end of the previous parasha. There the Torah explains that each journey of the nation and each encampment were undertaken at the word of Hashem.[9] As explained above, the last parasha ends with the nation encamped in the wilderness of Paran. In order for the camp to

(continued on next page)

Parshas Shelach

RABBI BERNARD FOX

begin a new journey, the Almighty's authorization was required.

Our parasha tells us that the spies were sent from the wilderness of Paran at the word of Hashem. This statement contains a message. The spies were beginning a journey from the existing encampment. Therefore, specific authorization was needed to break camp! In other words, the spies needed two separate authorizations. First, Hashem authorized Moshe to send scouts. This was an authorization of the concept. Second, a specific authorization was needed to undertake a journey from the established encampment.[10]

Of course, there is an obvious question. Hashem's authorization is needed in order for the nation to undertake a journey. In our parasha, it is not the nation that is undertaking the journey. It is a group of scouts. Why do the scouts require a special authorization to leave camp?

The Gaon of Rogachov -- Rav Yosef Rozin Zil answers that the spies were not a separate entity, distinguished from the rest of the nation. They were not merely an advanced scouting party. They were the beginning of the nation's journey into the land of Israel. The nation began its journey through sending the spies. With these scouts the nation began to leave its camp. Therefore, the specific authorization of Hashem was required.[11]

This explains an interesting comment in the Talmud. The Talmud is discussing the issue of agency. The Talmud is seeking a source for the rule that an agent can act on one's behalf. The

Talmud responds that this principle is derived from the incident of the spies. The spies acted on behalf of the nation.[12] Superficially, the discussion is difficult to understand. In what way were the spies the representatives of the nation? The above analysis answers the question. The journey of the spies represented the journey of the nation. Their departure from the wilderness of Paran was deemed the beginning of Bnai Yisrael's departure. In this manner, the spies were the agents of the entire nation.

This also explains another issue. Moshe selected leaders from the tribes to be members of this group. Why did Moshe choose leaders of the tribes? Many answers are offered. However, the above approach offers a very simple explanation. These scouts were required to act as the representatives of the people. In order to fulfill this role, these individuals were required to be leaders within their respective tribes. Without this position, they could not be deemed as representatives of their tribes.[13]

This brings us back to our original question. Why did Moshe instruct the spies to bring back fruit from the land? Based on the above approach, an interesting answer can be suggested. Moshe was not commanding these spies to merely scout the land. He was commanding them to begin the process of possession. They were to represent the nation and assume ownership of the land. Moshe's instructions to collect a portion of the fruit of the land can be understood in this context.

According to Torah law, land can be acquired in

three ways. First, it can be acquired through payment. Second, ownership can be transferred through a document. Third, land can be acquired through chazakah. Chazakah means performing an action that demonstrates ownership. If a person wishes to transfer ownership of land to another person, the recipient can establish possession through demonstrating ownership.[14]

How does a person acquire a parcel of land through chazakah? What specific actions are regarded as demonstrations of ownership? One of the forms of chazakah is harvesting the fruit of the land. Through harvesting the fruit the person demonstrates possession.[15]

We can appreciate Moshe's instructions. The spies were to initiate the process of possessing the land. He commanded them to perform an act of legal acquisition. They were to utilize chazakah. The harvesting of the fruit was an expression of this chazakah.[16]

[1] Rabbaynu Shlomo ben Yitzchak (Rashi), Commentary on Sefer BeMidbar 13:2.

[2] Sefer Devarim 1:22.

[3] Sefer BeMidbar 13:19-20.

[4] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Nachman (Ramban / Nachmanides), Commentary on Sefer BeMidbar 13:2.

[5] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Mishne Torah, Hilchot Teshuva 2:4.

[6] Sefer BeMidbar 13:3.

[7] Sefer BeMidbar 12:16.

[8] Sefer BeMidbar 13:3.

[9] Sefer BeMidbar 9:15-23.

[10] Rav Shimon Yosef Miller, Shai LaTorah (Jerusalem 5753), volume 3, pp. 139-140.

[11] Rav Shimon Yosef Miller, Shai LaTorah (Jerusalem 5753), volume 3, p 141.

[12] Mesechet Kiddushin 41a.

[13] Rav Shimon Yosef Miller, Shai LaTorah (Jerusalem 5753), volume 3, p 141.

[14] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Mishne Torah, Hilchot Mechirah 1:3.

[15] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Mishne Torah, Hilchot Mechirah 1:16.

[16] Rav Shimon Yosef Miller, Shai LaTorah (Jerusalem 5753), volume 3, p 141.

Gershon M. Pincus D.D.S.

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the deification of man II

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM



Reader: Why can't I believe that the Lubavitcher Rebbe performed miracles if that is not WHY I believe in him? Once my belief is based on Torah knowledge and wisdom, why do you say that I shouldn't believe that he could do a miracle?

Mesora: First, you must be clear on one point: man cannot perform miracles, not even Moses, and certainly not the Lubavitcher Rebbe. This is because man is a "created being", and has arrived on the world's stage after G-d has already established the properties of all existences: "A statute and time (G-d) gave to them, that they shall not deviate from their appointment." (Excerpt: Sanctification of the New Moon blessing) This quote teaches that man cannot override G-d's laws and create miracles - a suspension in nature's laws. True, prophets like Moses were 'involved' in miracles. But no one - not even the greatest of men, Moses - could partake in a miracle, unless G-d performed it. So without G-d's intervention, man is as weak as a worm.

I am quite familiar; this theory of rebbes doing miracles is widespread. I have heard rabbis espousing this belief. I have even heard first hand, a rabbi claim that an event of finding a book was unnatural. In other words, he was saying that a miracle occurred for him. I found this quite haughty, while his congregants enjoyed it. Where is the "tznius" (modesty) of our leaders? "And humbly shall you walk with your G-d." (Micha, 6:8)

One must not be moved by stories, even when our leaders buy into this deceptive and destructive hype. I feel one reason for their belief is based on misinterpretations of Talmudic accounts where metaphors depict Talmudic sages doing miraculous feats. Such stories create a void in present day congregants - they want 'their' Rebbe to be on par with the ancients. Therefore, they spread fables to elevate their reputations. And those prophets, for whom G-d did in fact perform miracles, be mindful of what high level such an individual was on. So when we hear stories that these very Rebbes gave poor advice, saying someone would live, but in fact died (as I have heard first hand) is such a false prediction from G-d's chosen one, for whom He would enact a miracle? This does not make sense. G-d will not lend His miracles to those who mislead others.

Let's briefly think of the possibilities you suggest: A) a miracle did occur for a Rebbe, but not in front of others. In such a case, I ask: is it that the Rebbe himself told others of his miraculous experience? This cannot be, for this is not the circulating story. Surely such a quote would be heard. Therefore, it can only be that others repeat that a miracle happened. But if it was not performed in front of others, and the Rebbe didn't repeat it, how would others know? B) The miracle did happen in front of others. If so, where are the corroborating witnesses? We never hear someone telling us "I saw the miracle", but rather, "I heard there was a miracle." These first two possibilities are therefore dismissed, leaving one other: C) the miracle did not happen but a story was concocted.

But is this what G-d desires, that we accept the "popular", in place of reason? This is absurd. Additionally, do not be impressed by "who" believes in such stories, even if titled "rabbi". Here is a good rule to follow: "Much applause cannot alter illusion into reality." Meaning, although believed by members of his audience to have caused an elephant to vanish, the magician is simply a manipulator - never capable of a drop more. Both, the audience's size, and status of attendees cannot make the magician more than what he is - human. So too, when it comes to Jews believing that Rebbes

(continued on next page)

perform miracles. Regardless of the masses of believers, or their rank in Jewish society, we follow reason, which teaches that man is powerless.

You cannot be truly "based on Torah knowledge and wisdom" as you suggest, while believing unproven miracles were performed by man. I will explain. Judaism is not based on belief, but on proof. This is its essential difference from all other religions. For this reason, G-d gave man intelligence - the gift for discerning fact from fiction. Reason and provability would not have been given to man, had G-d simply desired simple, blind faith.

G-d's enactment of Revelation at Sinai was for the very purpose of affording man some means by which to fulfill the first of the Ten Commandments - the command of Knowing G-d. Revelation at Sinai was manifested in front of millions through undeniable miracles, for a great reason: to conclusively prove G-d's existence. G-d created this event, as He desires mankind - throughout all generations - to have a rational proof for His existence. G-d desires that man use reason to arrive at his religious convictions, and all other truths.

This also means that G-d demands that we do not follow that which is bereft of proof. Directing man to follow only what is proven means that G-d desires that we do not follow what is unproven. If G-d did not care whether man followed unproven miracles, Sinai would not be needed. But we see the opposite is the case. For this reason, we do not follow unproven stories, as it is a direct violation of G-d's will.

What would be your argument against a Christian who believes that Jesus performed miracles? According to you, you must applaud a Christian who does so. Why should he be any different than you? You would support idolatry, if you remain in your current position. But Judaism's view is to follow reality, not imagination. Therefore, you must not support any other religion, and you must not support the belief in miracles, other than those proven.

It is irrelevant whether belief in the Lubavitcher Rebbe (or others) to work miracles, forms your religious belief or not. The crime is no less harmful if you arrive at a belief in miracle workers, even after accepting Judaism without it. For when you accept stories of miracle workers - at any point in life - you thereby abandon the proof of Sinai as an exclusive proof of G-d's will. You essentially deny the unique nature of Sinai, which then allows you to view any story of miracles - even with no witnesses - equally viable as Sinai. And when you do so, your entire proof of Judaism tumbles downward. You will be no better than any other religionists.

Exodus 19:9 reads, "Behold I come to you in thick cloud, so that the people shall hear when I speak with you, and (so also) that the people believe in you forever..." G-d clearly teaches us the purpose of Revelation at Sinai. It alone provided the people proof in G-d, and in Moses. These are G-d's words.

In his Laws of the Fundamentals of Torah, (8:1) Maimonides writes, "The Jews did not believe in Moses our teacher because of the wonders he performed. For one who believes based on wonders, there is doubt in his heart, 'perhaps the sign was done secretly or with sleight of hand.'" He continues a few sentences after, "And with what did the Jews believe in him? With Revelation at Sinai, that our eyes saw it and not a stranger, and our ears heard it and none other..."

The Jews believed in Moses and G-d because of Revelation at Sinai. This alone must form our foundation for our beliefs. We thereby learn, that only those events that carry absolute proof - such as Sinai - are what G-d desires we accept as truth. G-d desires we denounce all other accounts. Based on this principle given to us by G-d, we denounce Jesus, Mohammed, and all other false prophets.

This principle, that Judaism is a system built on proof and reason alone, must guide our every thought and action. However, once we betray reality, once we wed cultural deviances, Judaism is widowed by her mate's

estranged love for aliens. We have abandoned Judaism entirely, regardless of how well we mimic the commands with our actions. Samuel said, "Is G-d desirous of burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as following His word?" (Samuel I, 15:22) Meaning, simply acting out commands, while not adhering to the Torah's underlying fundamentals, is not desirable before G-d. For with such corruption where man betrays reason, he no longer relates to G-d, or Judaism.

I don't know from where there originated this story you mention of the Rebbe performing miracles. But I ask you, is it a small thing to you, that our founding Patriarch Abraham was astounded that G-d would perform a miracle for him, giving him a child at 100 years of age? Yet, you so easily accept stories from others that someone - not a prophet (the Talmud teaches prophecy ended) - is not only unsurprised by miracles, but also, performs them?

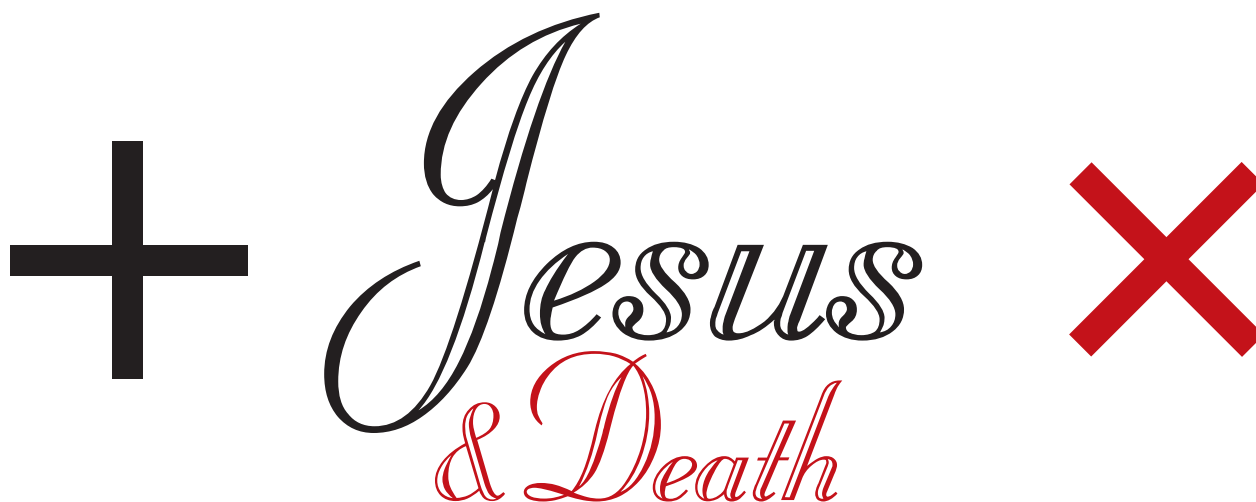
No intelligent man will ever tell another person that he can override G-d, and perform miracles. And if someone says that G-d commanded him to do miracles, or that he can do miracles, he does that which is similar - in my mind - to a false prophet like Jesus, the punishment being death. For even if unlike the False Prophet, he says, "I will do miracles to support the Torah's words", he is saying that he received some communication from G-d, when in fact, he has not. For man cannot do miracles, without G-d's intervention. By saying G-d has instructed him to perform miracles when G-d has not, he falsely claims prophecy. Jesus did the same thing.

So you see, accepting stories that the Rebbe did miracles is no small matter. And if the stories were not corroborated by the Rebbe himself, you malign him in the process. It is preferable to be silent, than to repeat unproven stories. The truth of someone's life experiences eventually surfaces, and his reputation does not require our subsequent deification. If we have no conclusive proof about some matter, repeating it will not make it truer. And if a person was so great that G-d did in fact intervene with miracles, G-d knows his greatness and rewards him. That is all that matters. It is irrelevant whether or not we hear or repeat such a story. If G-d desires, and publicizes a miracle as He has done with the prophets, then there will be no doubt about it. So, there is nothing gained by repeating unproven events. It is poor judgment that leads to talking about that for which no proof exists, to fabricate a reputation with miraculous fables, and to focus on man instead of G-d.

G-d does not desire to create deified reputations of man, nor does a righteous man desire it. G-d requires that the focus of our lives is He alone, as this is the goal of Torah. The prophets shunned the spotlight, as seen from the account of Elisha and Naaman. When Naaman requested Elisha to rid him of his leprosy, Elisha did not leave the house, but rather, he sent a messenger to instruct Naaman to bathe, and this would remove his ailment. Naaman was upset with Elisha, that he did not come out, call upon G-d's name, and "wave his hand over the place of the leprosy and remove it". A friend suggested wisely, that Elisha desired that G-d retain the grandeur for such a miracle, therefore, Elisha did not leave the house. Elisha avoided the spotlight, as he knew that G-d was the performer of all miracles, and did not want to mislead Naaman. Elisha was aware that people desire to believe in man as a miracle worker. Elisha therefore avoided credit for that which man has no connection with.

If the prophets properly shunned any credit for miracles, we must also assume that a Torah leader will learn from Elisha, and follow his modest and truthful lead. I do not believe any Talmid Chocham - a wise Torah scholar - would take credit or announce a miracle that happened to him, for the wise are humble, and Moses being the most humble of all men proves this point. Surely, one who might boast, would never have a miracle enacted for him.

You must realize the magnitude of the destruction to Judaism, and yourself, when deifying man. ■



Jesus & Death

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

Reader: I was raised Jewish, but am presently non-practicing. My question is, what are we taught through the Torah about death and the hereafter? Do we believe that there is life after death? If so, are the basic beliefs that good people go to heaven and bad to "hell"?

I am married to a Christian and would like to explain our beliefs to him. His religion teaches them that only those who believe in Jesus Christ will go to heaven. What is your retort to that? Thank you, J.G.

Mesora: You must first understand that Jesus was a false prophet. No Biblical standards for being the Messiah were met by him. (This is the precise reason they claim a "second coming"; his first – and truthfully only life – was a devastating failure.) The words of those who wrote the Christian Gospel, in no way represent G-d's true Bible – the Torah. You may prove this to yourself by examining Maimonides' words on what determines that someone is the Messiah. I mention Maimonides, as he was at the forefront of Judaism's teachers. The world knows that G-d gave the Jews the Torah. This is a historical truth. Therefore, to arrive at G-d's laws and verified principles, we consult only those who received, and meticulously adhere to G-d's words – these are the Rabbis. Christians know

this and attempt to defend their lies by suggesting Jesus came to "update" the Torah. But this is ludicrous: G-d knows the future, and gave a law with all needed for it to sustain itself, and with no need for change. G-d knows the future, and any "update," indicates He did not know the future. Additionally, G-d instructs us in His Torah not to change the Torah at all. The Christians idea of an "update" is against all reason, as it denies G-d's absolute knowledge. Think about it for yourself. There is no getting around this truth.

That being said, Christians are bereft of anything resembling G-d's Torah given at Sinai. Their concoction that disbelief in Jesus results in an eternity in a fiery hell is simply another of their many means to convert Jews to Christianity. It's a scare tactic. Their Crusades show how far from G-d's peaceful Torah they are. If their ideas were sensible, why did they resort to murder of the innocent? Once we see their viciousness and lies, we need not try to disprove them on other areas, as their entire foundation has collapsed. We are assured that everything else they say is nonsense. Their fabrications cannot alter that which G-d said.

There is reward and punishment. This forms a basic tenet in Judaism. Judaism includes the conviction in the afterlife. Maimonides writes in his 13 Principles:

"Principle XI. That God gives reward to he who does the commandments of the Torah and punishes those that transgress its admonishes and warnings.

And the great reward is the life of the world to come and the punishment is the cutting off of the soul [in the world to come]. And we already said regarding this topic what these are. And the verse that attests to this principle is (Exodus 32) "And now if You would but forgive their sins - and if not erase me from this book that You have written." And God answered him "He who sinned against Me I will erase from my book." This is a proof that God knows the sinner and the fulfiller in order to give out reward to one and punishment to the other."

As our death is a mere 'physical' event, our souls are untouched by such an event. One's soul can continue to exist in a greater state, when not joined and limited by a body. This will be a state where man achieves his rewards for his good, and punishments for his crimes, unless G-d has given him either here on Earth. But as man's body lies in the grave, a 'hell' makes no sense. And as all true ideas, all concepts relating to death and the afterlife must be reasonable. There is more to be learned on these topics, so I urge your research of the Jewish Orthodox Rabbis' writings. ■