

G-d's Punishments

G-d's purposefully detailed accounts of the Flood and the Generation of the Dispersement teach man's flaws, and G-d's kindness in saving future generations from following in their ancestors' errors, as well as how He corrects generations, enabling man to exist.

ESTD
1997

JewishTimes

Dedicated to Scriptural and Rabbinic Verification
of Authentic Jewish Beliefs and Practices

Volume IV, No. 2...Oct. 15, 2004

WWW.MESORA.ORG/JEWISHTIMES

Download and Print Free

IN THIS ISSUE:

PARSHA: TOWER OF BABEL	1,3,4
ROBERT SANDLER	1,5
PARSHA: NOAH & THE FLOOD	1,2
LETTERS	6-8
TEMPLE'S DESTRUCTION	9,10
BOOKS: GUILT	11
CULTURE: RED BENDELS	12, 13

SUGGESTED READING:

SEE THESE AND OTHER ARTICLES AT OUR SITE

Maimonides' 13 PRINCIPLES

THE BASIC FOUNDATIONS WHICH ALL JEWS
MUST KNOW AS TRUE. WE URGE YOU TO READ THEM:
www.mesora.org/13principles.html

God's Existence: Belief or Proof?

www.mesora.org/belieforproof.html

God's Land Without God?

AN OPEN LETTER TO THE JEWISH COMMUNITY:
www.mesora.org/openletter/openletter2.html

Weekly Parsha

the Tower of Babel

RABBI ISRAEL CHAIT

It is a well-established principle in Judaism that a punishment from G-d is unique. When G-d punishes man, it is for his betterment. However, the generation of the flood was destroyed because there was no justification for

(continued on page 3)

IN MEMORY OF

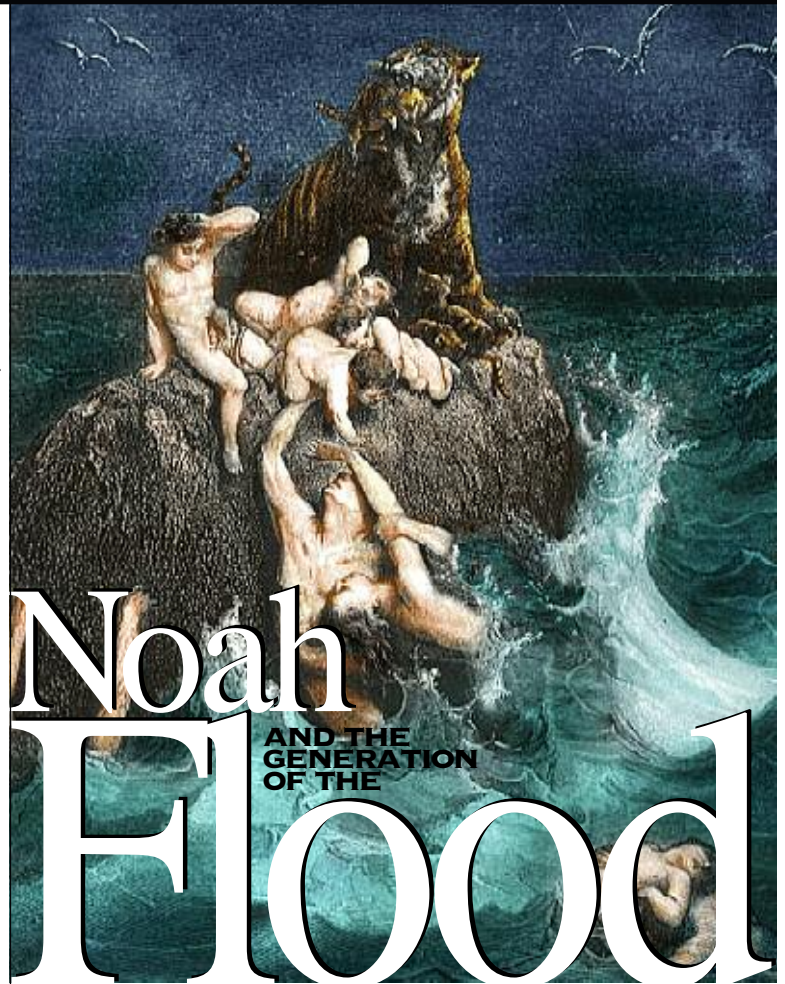
Robert Sandler

*An inspiration
to us all*

Robert Sandler passed away this Tuesday, October 12, 2004, the 27th of Tishrei, 5765. He was a young man, recently married, and had not reached 30 years of age. He dedicated years of his life to Torah study, and took this activity seriously. Robert was a kind, sensitive, pleasurable and understanding individual. I wish to make you all aware of Robert, sharing with you a very paraphrased glimpse into his character and perfections as I recall the best I can of the sentiments expressed by his many Rabbis and friends today:

Guy Tzadik: Robert was my brother in law. He was deeply brilliant and intellectually honest. He possessed the rare ability to attach himself to the 'idea', and not the self. When hearing another person's view, all that mattered to him was whether it was true, despite the fact that he did not originate the thought. He attached himself to the truth of others, as if it was his own. Originating the idea played no role in his value system. But he also respected individuals, never confronting anyone. He was concerned about people's feelings, to the point that even when he disagreed with others, he did so without rupturing their egos. He had no need to "show he was right". The

(continued on page 5)



Noah AND THE FLOOD

RABBI ISRAEL CHAIT

Written by students

In order to appreciate the milieu of the generation of the flood and the events that led to the destruction of civilization, we must analyze the verses in the Torah. Genesis 6:11 states "And the Earth was corrupted before G-d and the Earth was filled with violence." Rashi defines corruption as sexual immorality and idolatry. He defines violence as robbery. This verse is the prelude to G-d's determination that civilization must be destroyed because of the perpetuation of "chamas" (violence) throughout mankind. Thus chamas, robbery, sealed man's fate.

(continued on next page)

However, this final adjudication by G-d of man's fate was actually preceded by two earlier observations and warnings. Chapter six verse two states, "That the sons of G-d saw the daughters of man that they were fair, and they took for themselves wives, whomsoever they chose." Man was promiscuous and sought all types of sexual gratification without any moral restrictions. G-d thereby gave man his first warning. Man was given 120 years to repent from his sexual corruption or G-d would destroy mankind.

In chapter six verse five, G-d makes his second observation, "And G-d saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually." This observation of the quantitative increase in man's nefarious conduct led G-d to the conclusion that he will obliterate mankind from upon the face of the earth.

An analysis of these observations and warnings from G-d indicates a logical progression and sequence from man's initial corruption, until his ultimate degradation, to total depravity unworthy of salvation.

The first breakdown of the morality of man was his sexual promiscuity. Man's detachment from sexual illicit relationships is the source of man's sanctity.

Kedusha - sanctity - emanates from sexual abstention. Maimonides in his Mishna Torah in the laws of Kedusha has two categories: the laws of forbidden sexual relationships and the laws of forbidden foods. Thus we see that the sanctity of man stems from his ability to subordinate his instinctual desires. Kedusha is the supremacy of the "Tzelem Elokim", (man's intellect) over the "nefesh ha-behami", (man's instinctual desires), the appetitive and the sexual. Thus the first corruption of man was in allowing his emotions to rule his intellect.

The second step was the 'quantitative' increase in man's degradation. As man's libido and energies became attached to the instinctual pleasures, they obviously became a greater source of satisfaction for man. Thus, man's corruption became prevalent throughout society. The emotions of man totally dominated all aspects of his conduct. Hence, G-d saw that the wickedness of man was great.

However, the final corruption, which sealed man's fate, was when his depravity progressed to robbery. Nachmanides states that man's fate was sealed with the sin of robbery because it is a violation of a "mitzvah sichli" - a command arrived at through reason (without the need for G-d's command, i.e., something obvious). The prohibition against stealing logically makes sense. As Nachmanides says, it's a commandment, which does not require a prophet to warn us against it evils. However, Nachmanides' message must be understood. Simply because a commandment does not necessitate a prophet to warn us against its

violation, does not reflect upon the severity of the prohibition. It would seem that there are greater evils, which result from violating a mitzva, which is not sichli (reasonably obvious) and requires a prophet's warning. On the contrary, if our conduct warrants the rebuke of a prophet it must certainly be extremely grievous behavior. However, an analysis of Nachmanides interpretation leads us to a better understanding of the corruption of thievery and the reason it sealed man's destruction.

Man is different than an animal. An animal's existence is purely instinctual. His reality is subservient to his instinctual desires. An animal's existence is totally contained within the realm of the physical. An animal does not contemplate how long it is going to live.

Man however, is a complex creature. Man's nature is perennially the source of conflict. The instinctual desires of man are constantly in conflict with the intellectual.

Instinctually, man desires to live forever, but reality tells him that he is limited by the constraints of time. As a result there are essentially only two creations that are not in a constant state of conflict; the animal, because it is totally dominated and guided by the instinctual, and harmonious man, whose entire energies are directed towards wisdom. However an ordinary individual's instinctual desires are in conflict with, and tempered by his intellectual faculties.

The original pratfall for man was sexual turpitude. The sexual instinct was overpowering, yet, man had not abandoned the intellectual. In fact, man utilized his wisdom in the pursuit of his desires.

However, man was doomed to extinction when violence prevailed. Robbery is reflective of a society that totally abandons the rules of common sense. Man was no longer functioning in the world of reality. He was no longer using his mind in the pursuit of his physical pleasures. He was involved in violent, self-destructive behavior. This is what Nachmanides meant when he said that violence sealed man's fate because it was a violation of an obviously, reasonable law. Man was entirely in the grasp of his instinctual desires - to the extent - that his intellectual faculties were no longer functioning. Therefore, the warning of a prophet would not be heeded since man is functioning solely in the realm of the physical world. His self-destructive behavior manifests the abandonment of the intellectual, even as a means for the pursuit of physical pleasures. Violence epitomizes the state of the domination of the instincts. Thus, G-d determined that man's existence was equal to his non-existence and civilization was destined to be obliterated.

It is significant to note that violence flourished and was fostered by man's initial domination by his sexual desires. It is when man abandons the intellectual repression of sexual promiscuity, that

his instinctual appetites be cultivated and ultimately dominates him. Merely because the violations of the sexual mores are victimless infractions, does not diminish the severity of the offense. It is the breeding ground whereby a corrupt individual's instinctual desires gain strength and overpower the intellectual, and thus, subjugate the tzelem Elokim - the intellect - to the whims of the physical. Chamas - violence - is a natural outgrowth of such a behavioral progression and condemns mankind to a worthless existence.

Noah however, did not fall prey to the corruption of the society. Although he was considered righteous, the Rabbis castigate him for not attempting to influence other people. Noah never tried to influence his fellow man to behave in a just fashion. This is bothersome, considering the fact that the Torah refers to Noah as a tzadik, a righteous and pure individual. Certainly, justice would dictate that he help the plight of his fellow man. Thus, we must appreciate the appellation tzadik as utilized in respect to Noah.

There are two types of righteous individuals: Abraham typifies the higher level. This is the just individual who lives in a corrupt society and functions therein. In terms of his personal ideals (of monotheism) they were foreign to the values of that society. He was a foreigner in this respect. However, he was a citizen of the world. He functioned externally as a productive member of society. In fact, he attempted to influence other members of society to adopt his values and ideals.

The other type of righteous individual cannot tolerate the influences of a corrupt society. He retreats and lives the life of seclusion always insulating himself from external pressures. Noah was this type of personality. The Rabbis teach us that Noah was a ma-amin, he was a believer, but yet he did not believe. He possessed the intellectual conviction to reject society's values. However, he was cognizant of the temptations of the world around him and thus lived a sheltered life. Noah appreciated that he was in conflict and could not risk the dangerous exposure of facing the outside world. He lived an existence whereby he realized he was in conflict, but resolved the conflict in favor of the intellect. Therefore God did not blame him for not attempting to influence others. His state of perfection prevented him from helping others. Thus, Noah was righteous and pure, but yet, the Torah adds "b-dorosav", "in his generation" (was he perfect). His actions were not inherently corrupt and thus he was not deserving of extinction. However, his righteousness was commensurate to the times he lived in. He was indirectly culpable because his state of perfection prevented him from venturing into the outside world and aiding others. However, he still was righteous, for one cannot be held responsible for not helping others live the proper life if it would risk his own perfection. Thus Noah was a tzadik in his generation. ■

their existence. In contrast, the generation that built the tower of Babel was not destroyed. We must therefore understand the reason that their destruction was not warranted. We must also comprehend the nature of their punishment and the manner in which it was beneficial for them.

The reason that G-d prefers for their not being destroyed was because their sin was only against G-d. This is in contrast to the generation of the flood whose decadence was prevalent with respect to interpersonal relationships as well. However, the "dor haflaga", generation of the dispersement, had extremely cordial and respectful relations and acted peaceably toward each other. This concept must be explained. Simply because their interpersonal relations were peaceful and harmonious is hardly sufficient justification for their salvation. A person can be totally wicked but his relationship with his friends can be eminently serene. The Nazi's were very cordial, cultured and peaceful towards their fellow Nazi's. It is evident that the Torah is teaching us a more esoteric message.

We must also explain what they were attempting to build. Genesis 11:4 states "And they said: Come let us build a city, and a tower, with its top in heaven and let us make us a name, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth." What was their purpose and objective in building this tower?

In order to appreciate the significance of this entire incident we must elaborate some well-defined psychological principles.

Every human being has a certain emotional make up. These emotions - although somewhat controllable - nevertheless find a way to be expressed in terms of human behavior. A person has certain emotional needs and desires and is capable of repressing them to a great degree, but these needs will ultimately find some form of expression in terms of that individual's conduct. As a result, if the person is successful in controlling his emotions concerning one area of his behavior, invariably, these emotions will find an outlet for their expression in another area of his conduct. An illustration of this is when a person is angry because of a business transaction that failed. Instead of expressing his anger at his business partner who mishandled the transaction, he might go home and break something. The emotions of man are flexible enough, that they will seek a "Substitute Formation," an alternate way to express itself.

The emotions of man are also very cunning and can operate in a disguised fashion. They can function in such a way as to be hidden - even to the person himself. Madison Avenue, the renowned center of advertising, carefully manipulates the emotions in this manner. A

person who fantasizes that he's a great cowboy will smoke Marlboro. These are called hidden persuaders. A person is not just buying the product, but he is buying the underlying fantasy it represents. If one were to ask the person if he was a cowboy, of course he would reject such a notion.

All these characteristics of our emotions and the methods in which they work together regarding the many nuances of human behavior, can help us understand the events surrounding the Tower of Babel.

Upon observing mankind's conduct in building the Tower of Babel, G-d makes the following comment in Genesis 11:6, "And the lord said: Behold, they are one people, and they have all one language, and this is what they begin to do, and now nothing will be withheld from them, which they propose to do."

To help us appreciate this observation we must elucidate a very basic psychological process that accounts for much of man's altruistic behavior. Psychologists call this mechanism "identification". The greater effect an event has upon a person, the more significant the event. Thus, an earthquake in China killing 10,000 people might not seem as tragic to you as the mugging of your next-door neighbor. Conversely, a person stricken with cancer might bequeath great sums of money to anti smoking crusades. However, the tragic effects of cancer were surely known prior to his misfortune. Although a person's efforts in this regard are praiseworthy and humanitarian, and contribute to the benefit of society, it is not the highest level of just conduct. A rare individual, who functions according to an extremely high standard of human justice, is aroused mainly by the event and not the manner in which he is affected thereby. However, identification is generally a desired emotion that accounts for much of the good in society and allows a person to commiserate with his fellow man. If one lacks identification, the consequences could be tragic.

Now we can begin to comprehend G-d's observation. "Behold they are one nation with one language" Language is a strong factor with respect to human identification. Language represents unification. Private groups have their own special language and secret codes. Kids usually have their own slogans and phrases to help them identify with other kids - against the adults. Thus, G-d observed that mankind was one nation with one language. There was great identification amongst, and unification with, their fellow man. However, we must analyze how this identification contributed to their building the Tower of Babel. In Genesis 11:5 the Torah states, "And G-d came down to see the city and the tower, which the children of men built." Rashi comments that this

term the "children of man" is superfluous. He thus comments that these are the children of 'man who rebelled against the one G-d' that were saved from the flood.

We therefore see that the sin of these people was their rebellion against G-d. However, their animosity and rebellion against G-d was really a result of their identification with their fellow man.

Man's basic innate nature is aggressive. This is attested to by the many atrocities committed by man throughout the annals of history. Man generally directed his aggression in the form of hateful acts perpetrated upon his fellow man. However, the generation of the Tower of Babel had a tremendous sense of identification with their fellow man, fostered by their being one nation with one language. It was also strengthened by their being the survivors of the Flood. This shared experience as alluded to by Rashi, also caused them to identify with each other. This identification prevented their aggressive conduct from being directed against their fellow man. Thus, man's aggressive proclivities were directed against G-d. Their emotions of hatred and their aggressive tendencies found a substitute formation, namely G-d. Their inherent aggressive tendencies, which are usually directed one against another, now found an alternate means of expression - a rebellion against G-d. However, these people whose ancestors were recently obliterated by G-d because of their corruption, could not in good sense, express open hostility and hatred to G-d. Thus, this hatred presented itself in a different way. They said, "Let us build a city and a tower with its head in the heavens."

The tower represents architecture. This building was not built to be functional, as they were not going to use the building. On the contrary, it was a manifestation of their own power and importance. This is what architecture represents throughout civilization. Albeit the Eiffel Tower, or The Coliseum, all great architectural works are merely an expression of the power and significance of that particular society.

Individuals as well display this same attitude. A person who lives in a mansion with a huge driveway, is also generally creating an impression of his own self importance. Therefore the peoples' method for rebelling against G-d was demonstrating the greatness of man's accomplishments. It is the deification of man.

Mankind, by building the Tower of Babel, was manifesting the greatness of man, and in so doing, was rebelling against G-d. This was the sin of this generation.

Halacha recognizes this emotion. The migdal, tower, was an elaborately ornate and beautifully appointed structure intended to inspire man. However, these emotions were directed towards

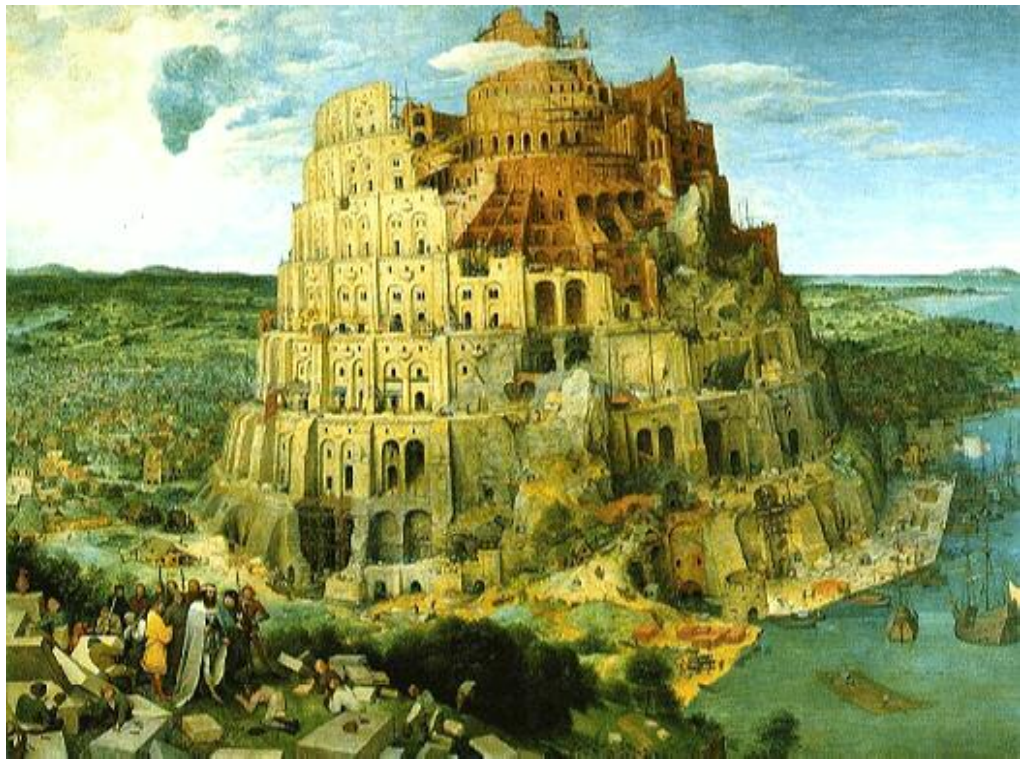
(continued on next page)

(Tower of Babel continued from page 3)

the greatness of man, and not G-d. Conversely, halacha (Jewish law) demands that the tallest building in a community must be the synagogue. G-d must maintain the greatest prominence in our minds.

G-d thereby concludes verse 6, that mankind, because of this attitude of the overestimation of their own self importance, will feel that nothing can be withheld from them and that there is nothing that they can not accomplish. G-d realized that this emotion was dangerous and must be dealt with accordingly. Thus in Chapter 11 verse 7, G-d responds, "Come, let us go down and there confound their language, that they may not understand one another's speech." G-d was confounding their language as the vehicle to break their identification with each other. Once they had different languages, different cultures would flourish. When G-d changed their culture and language, hatred and jealousy commenced. When each society has its own unique culture and language, the identification between the different societies is mitigated greatly. This enables man's aggressive instinct to express itself, by acts of hatred and aggression against another society. Therefore G-d's punishment (corrective measure) was breaking the strong sense of identification that existed throughout mankind. The emergence of different societies with different cultures erased the identification that had previously existed between these groups. Consequently, man's aggressive tendencies were thereafter naturally directed against citizens of a different society with different values. The natural outgrowth of G-d's punishment is a civilization where there are constant wars between different segments of society. However, the alternative would be worse, whereby mankind would rebel against G-d. Judaism maintains that mankind will experience constant strife until the coming of the Messiah. It is only when Messiah comes that people will possess the proper philosophical knowledge. Then mankind will be able to channel their energies to the acquisition of wisdom and gain a love of G-d. It is only then that mankind can experience true peace.

We can therefore appreciate the necessity of G-d's punishment. However we must contrast the generation of the Flood that had to be destroyed and the generation of the Tower of Babel, which was spared. G-d's punishment was obviously more lenient with the generation of the Tower of Babel. The bothersome problem is that hatred and rebellion against G-d seems to be a greater evil than the corruption of man. Yet, the generation of the Flood was eradicated and the generation of the Tower of Babel was spared.



The proper determination of this problem demands that we pose a different question. We must not investigate which malady was 'worse', but rather, which transgression is 'curable'. If a disease is incurable, then it leads to an inevitable end. However, if there is a cure, then there is hope, irrespective of the severity of the disease. The citizens of the generation of the Flood were totally overwhelmed by their evil inclinations, their instinctual appetites. Their intellectual faculties were not functioning and thus there was no way to influence them. The generation of the Tower of Babel however suffered the disease of overestimation of the self. Although G-d cannot fathom an arrogant person, as the power of the ego is great – denying G-d – yet, such a person can still be reached. The conceited individual still operates on a rational level; he is just inflicted with the malady of the overestimation of his own self-importance.

The Rabbis tell us that the generation of the flood had no shalom, peace, but the generation of the Tower of Babel had serenity. Peace requires self-control and intelligence. The generation of the Tower of Babel, although unified for a terrible cause, still possessed the essential elements required for harmony. Therefore, G-d's punishment was to confound their language and break their identification. This resulted in man's aggressive instinct to be directed away from G-d. Unfortunately, society is at a level whereby man's aggressive instincts express themselves by man's perpetuation of

great atrocities against his fellow man. People usually try to deny their aggressive instincts and ultimately that causes much bloodshed. Judaism, on the contrary demands that a person lives his life based upon reality. A person must be aware of his aggressive tendencies. It is a universal emotion that stems from the instinctual part of man's nature. However, a person must learn to subordinate his instinctual desire and to live his life based upon wisdom. The Talmud tells us if a person is overly aggressive he should become a butcher. A person should recognize his instinctual nature, and learn to control it. Piety is not the denial of one's emotions and desires. Judaism does not preach asceticism and abstinence. A chacham, a wise person, is one who recognizes his needs and desires and channels his energies properly. A person cannot deny his emotions. This was part of the sin of the generation of the Tower of Babel. They really denied their aggression towards G-d and directed it to expressions of their own self-importance. Thus, these emotions sought satisfaction by the building of the tower. Through the means of architecture they satisfied their emotional needs.

Upon the arrival of the Messiah, civilization will appreciate the proper philosophical values and will guide their lives based upon wisdom. Only then will man recognize his aggressive nature and properly channel his energies, and subordinate his instinctual drives. Only in such a society can we experience true peace. ■

(continued from page 1)

In Memory of Robert Sandler

self was never his concern, unless it was the 'self' of others, in which case he handled people's feeling delicately, and with genuine concern.

Robert was liked by all. He was extremely pleasant, and never burdened anyone with his own problems. He also never expected anything in return. He had the quality of always meaning what he said, "he was not "Echad b'Peh v'Echad b'Lave", two faced.

I will eternally miss his frequent Shabbos visits to my home, meals shared together, and most of all, working out ideas in Torah and life. He was someone I enjoyed just being with and talking to about my own issues. He was of my closest friends, my closest brother-in-law, he was my daughters favorite uncle. I feel that part of me was buried with him. There are simply no stories or words to describe this tragedy. I hope the family will have nachama.

Guy (Brother-In Law)

Rabbi Israel Chait: We all feel the great tragedy and loss of Robert's passing. Robert loved learning. He was a simple and humble person. We mourn not only what he was, but also what he could have been with an even a longer life. Unlike Job, of whom G-d told Satan to take control of all of him except for his life, this injunction was not applied to Robert - even Robert's life was subjected to the Angel of Death: it came quickly, like a thief in the night. Robert was niftar (passed away) at a young age by the Avone HaDor (the sin of the generation).

Job was referred to as one who was "Tam v'Yashar v'Yiray Elokim, v'Sur may-Ra", "a simple soul and upright, who fears G-d and avoids evil." This was Robert. He loved learning Torah and led a life of Torah.

Rabbi Reuven Mann: Many people strive for knowledge and Torah. With knowledge, many can even see the faults that people possess. However, the greater challenge is to see one's own faults, to accept them, to work on removing them, and to overcome them. Few individuals are totally honest about themselves. I worked with Robert, addressing his concerns, as we all have in our lives. I witnessed in him an unusual strength and courage to discover truths about himself, and to apply these truths in action.

Rabbi Chaim Ozer Chait: While dorming in yeshiva at Michmas, Israel, Robert exemplified a gentle spirit, never speaking bad about anyone, even at the early age at 15, and even when dorm life usually evokes friction among peers in tight-knit living quarters. Robert was unaffected by his environment, and remained true to the proper character of a Ben Torah.

Rabbi David Markowitz: Robert was a sincere and loving person. He looked at his wife with the same love as he did when they dated years earlier. He

enjoyed learning, and possessed a very quick mind. When we learned together, I was amazed at his ability to instantly think of insights immediately after reading a Gemara.

Robert was very humble. Upon his inclusion into the Law Review, he said there must have been a mistake - and he was not displaying a false humility. He sincerely felt that some error was made. You would never know Robert was in the room until he spoke up. He sought no fanfare. Robert was once asked to speak to a crowd of co-workers at his office where I also worked, and as such a simple person, I didn't know how he would handle it. But when he spoke, he was so articulate and intelligent.

Robert genuinely appreciated thought, and was a true "adam", a true man - he was attached to what matters most, to learning, and he lived this way.

Rabbi Howard Bald: Robert sought admission to the high school where I was the director. I usually tested students after I interviewed them. I recall Robert's humility as he said to me, "What can you test me on, I don't know anything yet? I am here because I want to learn."

Watching Robert child grow, his parents derived much Nachas (satisfaction and joy) from how their son developed into such a fine person. I too parallel this Nachas, although from afar, as I witnessed Robert become what he was, a true Ohave Torah. His desire to learn and discuss ideas, and then review them until they were clear to him kept me attentive on Shabbos, times when I would normally relax. His desire to learn was a pleasure to me.

Rabbi Zev Farber: Robert enjoyed making people of all ages laugh. He could go on for long sessions simply desiring to entertain others with his creative wit, and he would even play with my daughter for an hour, getting her equally amused. He truly loved people. On many USY bus trips together, Robert would amuse us all, what I feel is a sign of one who truly loves others. He was my best friend. I will miss the intelligent exchanges in social ideas, and our initiation together in Talmudic study. Without Robert around, everything in my life will be compromised.

Mordy Lahasky: Robert was a very pleasant person. Robert was also very compliant, and simply went with the flow. He was very accommodating, and never imposed his will on others. His love for others was unmatched. People are not born this way; his parents must have raised him in such a perfected manner, that Robert had such sincere care and passion for others. His parents should be proud, very proud of Robert.

Moshe Ben-Chaim: I knew Robert for many years as a fellow student. All of the Rabbis and friends who I have recorded from today's funeral depicted the Robert I knew, but they also taught me

things I was not aware of. I too will share with all of you an incident that took place just two months ago.

One evening I was traveling home on the train, and I saw Robert in the distance as we boarded, he did not see me at that moment, and I did not approach him, and I simply sat down to rest. Later, during the train ride, from behind me, I heard a familiar voice saying "hi". I turned, and Robert was sitting right behind me. We had a pleasant conversation, and then a topic came up where I wanted to get in touch with someone, and Robert knew this person. Without hesitation, he pulled out his cell phone and called his wife Yafit to obtain the phone number of this person. A minute later, I had the number. I thanked him.

Robert did not have to interrupt his ride and relaxation time after a day in the City, as I poorly exemplified, but he wished first - to recognize me, and second, like Rebecca at the well, to inquire of my welfare and sought to determine how could help me in any way, and then proceeded to do so with zeal. I learned that Robert was the type of person who derived satisfaction from the happiness he could bring to others: "Vahavta Ray-Acha Camocha", "Love your friend like yourself". This is how Hillel summed up the Torah's philosophy. Robert demonstrated this genuinely, with no interest in reciprocation - he acted this way by nature. Who is like this today?

Robert was a very patient and kind soul, and had a very subtle, intelligent, clever and effective manner in which he brought smiles to everyone. I also recall his precision and in-depth remarks and svaros (theories) in many classes we attended together under our Rabbis.

He exemplified par excellence, the most prized of the four types of personalities recorded in Pirkei Avos: slow to anger and easily appeased. I never saw him angry, and I can tell that even if he ever got slightly offended, he would be appeased even before being approached by those who might have slighted him. Such a character as Robert should be taken to heart. For with our duplication of his midos, his perfected character, much harmony will follow.

We may learn from people in their lifetimes, but as I discovered today, we can also learn even more from them after they have passed. Robert has certainly left an indelible impression on me, and in the minds and hearts of all those with whom he came in contact, one which we all will share with others. I thank Rabbi Howard Burstein for helping recall these eulogies. He took a few moments with me at my request to remind me of what I omitted. I apologize if I misquoted anyone, or left out any sentiments expressed today. I wish to you, Yafit, Robert's wife, and Robert's parents, family, and friends, that you are all comforted among the rest of the mourner's of Zion and Jerusalem.

I invite anyone who wishes, to email your memories, thoughts or sentiments of Robert so we may include them for others to read in next week's issue: moshebenchaim@mesora.org ■

Letters

G-d's Words -Not Man's Fantasies

Mesora: As a final refutation of the claim made in Tanya, that man's soul is "part" of G-d, we quote: "...and I have made the souls." (Isaiah, 57:16) G-d declares that souls are created things, not part of His indivisible nature. Division is inapplicable to G-d.

Oral Law Defining the Written Law

Reader: Where is it written that we fast on Yom Kippur and other holidays? Is it in the Torah, the Commentaries etc?

Mesora: The Torah states that we "afflict" ourselves on Yom Kippur, and the Talmud bears out what those afflictions are. The Talmud is the record of the Oral Law, also received at Sinai from G-d to Moses and the Jews, along with the Written law, and is essential to understanding the Torah's words.

Torah vs Other Religions

Reader: I was told that Ezra is entitled as "son of G-d" in Koran, Sura 9:30. Would you please let me know your point of view about this? Thank you very much for your kind help. With best regards, David.

Mesora: We do not recognize any work or religion outside of the Torah and Orthodox Judaism. This is the only religion given by G-d, attested to by millions of witnesses...all other religions are based on the word of a single person, and thus, are not provable. See "Torah from Sinai" on our site: www.Mesora.org (by Rabbi Chait) Therefore, quotes from the Koran

are meaningless, and are corrupt by definition. G-d said He gave one Torah, one Bible and one religion, and He will never change it. Reason also demands this to be so: as G-d knows all future generations, only ignorance would demand an "update" to a formerly given religion, and G-d possesses no ignorance. Thus, the Torah is the only religion, for all times.

Even when we find a statement that bears some similarity to a Torah concept, be mindful that you must view the entire scope of a religion to understand their particulars. For example, the concept of 'prayer' is found in most religions, not just in Judaism. However, if another religion subscribes to a broader view that "man makes G-d happy", then this religion's prayer is heresy. G-d teaches that we cannot affect Him, and that He is beyond "needs" or emotions. We have no concept what he is. Therefore, we cannot say anything about Him, other than what He stated in His Torah. It is only when we possess accurate knowledge of reality that our actions in fact reflect what is real and true. This is why it is so essential that as a starting point, every member of mankind must study the Torah's ideas on G-d, His actions, and His commands. It is through this only, revealed, Divine law that mankind may obtain truth, and what G-d desires of us, and what is proper to think. While Abraham demonstrated that this may be arrived at without the Torah, it is highly unlikely that normal individuals as ourselves will compare to Abraham's intelligence. Therefore, we must study the Torah, Prophets and Writings. We are also bound to follow commands to guide our actions, as thought alone does not perfect mankind.

Dealing with a Loss

Reader: A very dear friend and his family lost their son, who was just getting a start in life. This friend and family are not "Orthodox" however they do keep the Sabbath, etc. He in particular is kind, generous, good, and well liked by all. What can I do to be a friend and support him/them? Since G-d has taken their son and they have observed the Laws, they are losing their faith. Should or could I say anything to help? He says there is nothing you can say. Their loss is recent. I recently brought the pomegranates for the meal. They were quite pleased with the choice for the serving of fruit.

At this holiday in particular their loss is of great stress.

What can I do? Should/could I help spiritually, or let them see the Rabbi themselves? Either way I want to offer comfort and support. Rabbi, thank you for taking the time to be of help

Mesora: While it is true that we do not possess all of the answers, and this is certainly the worst tragedy - to lose a child, however, such a loss does not detract at all from the perfection G-d desires we obtain by adhering to His only religion: orthodox Judaism. Although we cannot answer specific cases all of the time, the Torah's lifestyle is the best for mankind, and our losses do not mitigate the Torah's benefits. I would be happy to talk with the parents.

I wrote an article addressing the loss of children on our site www.Mesora.org but I do not know that this will remove the pain of the parents. In time, I hope they will heal and be able to move forward.

We don't know why conclusively, that G-d allows children to die; no one has G-d's knowledge except G-d. But one explanation offered by the Rabbis is that it may be a punishment for the parents, if the child was not yet responsible for his own actions, meaning, he was less than 13 years of age. If he was older, he may have sinned, and this is why he was taken. G-d does not kill unjustly...He is the Creator of justice, so He acts with pure justice.

Additionally, we do not know what the future might have held for their child, and G-d has stated that He took Chanoch early (Genesis 5:24) although "he walked with G-d", to prevent his latter downfall, caused by others, and not because he was evil of his own doing. Please show this passage to the parents, and they should read Rashi's commentary. Perhaps this knowledge will allow them to feel grateful to G-d, perhaps G-d saved their son from a future evil, by taking him sooner. This is certainly a kindness, which G-d follows, as expressed in that passage.

Please offer them my sincere condolences, and again, they may contact me directly.

G-d's Annihilation

Reader: How does Judaism justify the violence of G-d in Hebrew Scriptures such as the command in Deuteronomy 7 to destroy the Canaanites and other nations? Are these simply stories to explain a facet of G-d's character; are

(continued on next page)

they historical events? If they were historical events, why would G-d command the utter destruction of an entire race of people?

Mesora: Just as with the Flood, G-d's destruction of many nations was based on their violation of morality, and worse, their utter evil, expressed in rape, robbery, and murder. See the verses in the Torah that teach why G-d destroyed the Generation of the Flood. (Gen: 6:1-8) "...they took wives from whomever they desired." (Rashi states even married women, even homosexuality, and even bestiality) Also in those verses the Torah states, "Man's thoughts were evil all day long..." Their ultimate fate was sealed due to robbery, a breakdown of the most fundamental foundations for societies basic function. (See Rabbi Israel Chait's articles; "Noah & the Generation of the Flood" and "The Tower of Babel")

G-d created mankind offering him life - provided he abides by basic, decent laws, and protects others. But in the cases where G-d annihilated nations, this was due to their extreme sins, which removed their entitlement to life. See Genesis 15:16, and Rashi's commentary where he states that G-d does not punish a nation until they have a full measure of sin deserving of punishment. Rashi quotes Isaiah 27:8, "according to its measure of sin..."

Yes - these stories are historical truths. You will learn what G-d's justice is, and that He does not punish the completely innocent, as stated so clearly in Ezekiel 18. Only the man who sins is punished.

Angels..... or Men?

Reader: I would like to ask you why Angels (Sons of G-d) liked daughters of men (Genesis 6:1-11)? How is this possible that creations of two different worlds had relations with each other, without permission of G-d? Angels and men are two different creations of G-d. It is very disturbing that creations cross the limits for their lust.

The second question is, did daughters of men, or men, recognize them? Did they struggle to not mix up with angels? And why did G-d reduce man's years? Also, why did G-d say that My spirit will not always strive in man? Are not men made in G-d's image? Thank you very much for your kind consideration.

Mesora: "Children of G-d" ("binay elohim")

is not how to understand this phrase. This verse (Gen. 6:2) does not refer to angels. Rather, it refers to children of prominent figures (Rashi) of that generation. The term "elohim" can also mean "judge", or prominent people. This generation's leaders were rebellious due to their high rank in society. As such, none opposed them, and they used their status to overpower whomever they wished, similar to today's many corrupt leaders. Regarding Gen. 6:3, where G-d states, "My spirit will not abide in man forever, for he is flesh, and his days will be 120 years", Unkelos teaches the following: "this evil generation will not be sustained". G-d will wipe out these sinners. "For he is flesh" is G-d's method of indicating the cause of their imminent destruction. "Flesh" means that this generation attached themselves to flesh, i.e., to lusts. However, the term of 120 years was not a limit on man's lifespan, but the number of years remaining until the Flood. Later on, in the post-Flood era, G-d did reduce man's age and stature, as these contributed to his invincibility, and thus, his rebellion against G-d.

The Torah's Expiration?

Reader: There have been discussions saying tattoos are wrong for today, citing the "law". What laws are applicable for today? I have a problem with people who pick and choose which to follow and which ones they say no longer apply.

Mesora: The Torah was designed by G-d. He knows the future, all generations. To say His law(s) are inapplicable today is to say that He could not anticipate the needs of future generations.

All Torah laws will be applicable forever. These are G-d's own words in Isaiah 59:21.

Gentiles & Holiday Observance

Reader: I am a Ben Noach and I'm wondering what a Gentile's role is in Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, vs. a Jew. Toda raba, Meichey.

Mesora: Gentiles are prohibited from making a holiday for themselves. However, mankind as a whole is judged on Rosh Hashannah, so I would deem it appropriate that all members of mankind examine their ways before this day and repent. Certainly, one should take stock of his actions daily, as the Rabbis teach, "Repent one day before you die. But how can I know when I will die? Therefore, repent every day."

Observance of any holiday is prohibited for the Gentile. This is not so much a restriction on him, as it is a means of focusing the role of "educator" on the Jew. Restriction of one group, may be - as in this case - a means to highlight another, i.e., the Jew. A Gentile's holiday observance would dilute the Jews' role as the sole teachers of G-d's Torah, and would cause many people to consult with those not well learned. By limiting Holiday and Sabbath practice to the Jews alone, the Jews - those engaged daily in rigorous Talmudic study - remain the only recognized teachers of G-d's Torah. This is good for the entire world population, that the most advanced Torah students remain the only teachers.

Are Gentiles & Jews Equal in G-d's Eyes?

Reader:: I don't understand that if Abraham was not a Jew, why is it so far fetched to consider that the gentiles may be his descendants as well.

Mesora: You are correct; many Gentiles are his descendants.

Reader: Also, according to the Torah, didn't those other than Jews travel the wilderness with Moses? If they chose to go out of Egypt rather than bow to other gods, it seems to me that their descendants would have been raised with the same theology. Thus, they must have been converted down the line as well. And on approaching Canaan, the Jews were told by G-d to destroy the Canaanites so as not to be tempted to bow the false gods. That says to me that the Jews and those traveling with them were not idol worshipers, or else, G-d would have had the Jews destroy any of their traveling companions who were.

Mesora: Without proof, we cannot assume

who did or who didn't convert. The fact that many Jews defected to idolatry teaches that although Abraham taught many, this does not insure that these people and their descendants remained true to monotheism.

Reader: And finally, I don't just believe that Hashem is the One and only, true G-d, I know He is. Therefore, it is difficult for me to accept that the gentiles are nothing to Him. We may not be His chosen ones, but he certainly must have created us for a purpose. So if we're not allowed to study the Torah {I do agree that we should not teach it- even if we could), or not bound by the same laws, then how can we gentiles ever expect to share in His Salvation?

Mesora: G-d does not view the Gentiles as any less worthy of life and perfection than Jews. The proof: G-d created every member of mankind, and gave each one of us a soul. This teaches that G-d desires each of us use this soul, our intellect, to arrive at the proper life outlined in His Torah. It is a false notion harbored by many Jews and Gentiles, that Jews are superior as to others. The Talmud teaches that a righteous Gentile is equal to the High Priest. Our only difference is that G-d desired that we study and teach the Torah...to all mankind. This designation was based on Abraham's perfection – a Gentile – and not our own greatness, and G-d's selection of his seed to lead all people in the form of Torah recipients and educators. This is verified by the verses in Genesis 18:18-19, "And Abraham will surely be a great nation and mighty, and all nations will bless him. For I know that he will command his son and his household after him, and they will guard the way of G-d, to do charity and justice in order that I bring upon Abraham that which I spoke on him." G-d teaches us in these Torah verses that Abraham was deliberate in his teaching of monotheism, and that he would insure that his son Isaac and his household after him would stay firm in charity and justice. Human perfection is described by G-d throughout the Torah and Prophets as straddling these two perfections: charity and justice. Based on Abraham's perfections, G-d concludes this verse teaching that He wished to bring upon Abraham the blessings He spoke of, i.e., that He would multiply his seed as the stars in heaven. (Gen. 15:5)

Reader: It seems to me that learning all we can about Hashem and doing His Will, would make the Messiah's job a lot easier when he comes.

Mesora: There is nothing "difficult" for G-d, or for Him to be successful with His Messiah. But you are correct that all people – Gentile and Jew alike – must strive to devote as much of our energies as possible to Torah study in the areas

each of us is commanded to perform.

Reader: Certainly G-d is patient, forgiving, loving, just and merciful (to name a few) and perhaps this is an over implication - but I think of it as having several children, and favoring one over the rest. This does not mean the rest are not worthy and are not loved, but their characters may be much different. And ironically the favored one is expected to perform better, just as G-d's chosen Jews are held to a higher standard and more is expected of them. So the bottom line is this; instead of discouraging the Gentiles, which may turn them to other religions, take a lesson from the messianic churches that are trying to convert the Jews to Christianity, but with one big difference: openly. Of course I wouldn't expect the Orthodox Jews to advance the Torah sneakily anyway as the Messianic Christian's do.

Mesora: If what you mean is that Jews should convert Gentiles, this is not G-d's command to us. And while I believe that any person would benefit in a greater measure when adhering to all of G-d's commands, this is a personal decision, and must not be mandated by anyone or any religion, but the person himself. Otherwise, where is the perfection in coerced, religious practice?

Christians and Mormons intent on the continued coercion of conversions must consider this point: man's perfection – as so perfectly exemplified by Abraham – is his "own" thought process, which leads him to discover new truths about reality, and G-d's will, and enacting these perfections. And unless one is acting from his own decision, he merits absolutely nothing by parroting. So forced conversions are truly meaningless, let alone the absurd practice of post mortem conversion acted out by Mormons.

I would conclude by reminding you that our greatest Kings, David and Solomon, and our Messiah, are all descendants of Ruth - the convert. If G-d selected Ruth, a former Moabite, to be the ancestor of our kings and Messiah, this is a conclusive proof that G-d does not favor the Jew over His other creations. Certainly, G-d's creation of a nation from Abraham proves this point too.

Look to G-d's words to determine what His will is - not man's ignorance.

wrong in this world? Does God in general do this?

Mesora: According to Rambam, one must be on a level to receive punishment. Rambam quoted King David when King David was referring to the other nations, he said, "c'vhamos nidmu", "they are equal to animals". Meaning, just as animals have no providence, so do those who have no G-d.

Also, it is written, "aise asher Hashem ohave, yochiach", "who ever G-d loves, He rebukes". Meaning, if one is honestly striving for the right life, G-d will steer him from the wrong way, and that is what we mean by punishment. We can term punishment more accurately as a "corrective measure."

Punishment: Not Removed Due to One's Repentance

Reader: "If the punishment associated with the violation of a particular commandment must be carried out no matter what, then what purpose does repentance serve?"

Mesora: The one positive effect of death for the one being slain is his atonement. Prior to his death, repentance by the individual is to correct his values and perfect his soul, but he still must be slain to uphold the system and instill fear in society. The Torah says that you kill so and so and then describes the societal benefit of the slain's death acting as a deterrent, "v'lo yzidoon ode" , "the people will not again sin". (Deut. 17:13)

Ezekiel Chapter 18, G-d completely forgives one who repents fully, even to the point that G-d will deter his timely death due to his new found perfection. However, perfection of the person does not warrant the courts to alter the halachik system. What is in man's (the courts) obligation to exercise must be meted out in accordance with Jewish law. G-d on the other hand will alter nature for the one who fully repents. G-d will even protect him from disasters, but G-d will not alter the system which is His desire to be fulfilled by man.

Complete repentance therefore assures us of G-d's complete protection from evils which arise due to nature, and the course of the world. But it does not cause the courts to abandon their following of the justice system. ■

Punishment

Reader: My question is what is Judaism's view on reward and punishment in this world as it relates to personal Divine providence? Meaning to say that if I do something wrong should I be concerned that God will then punish me for that

DESTRUCTION *of the* TEMPLE: CAUSED *by the* COMING *of the* MESSIAH?

JACK E. SAUNDERS



Before I begin to take up the issues that the Christian missionary has stated in the article[1] concerning the destruction of the Temple, I would like to point out that the nations - as well as Israel - have been suffering since the destruction of the Temple. King Solomon, when dedicating the first Temple, teaches us that the Temple of Hashem was to be universal from its very inception. He states in his dedication prayer that there would also be "strangers, that is not of thy people Israel"[2] who would also come to pray toward this place i.e., the Temple. According to the prophet Isaiah, the Temple was intended to be a universal place of prayer, "a house of prayer for all people." [3] Also, the prophet Zechariah states that during the reign of the King Messiah, that all nations would come to Jerusalem and the Temple to celebrate the festival of Sukkot,[4] and that failure to do so

will result in punishment.

The Torah, when describing the festival of Sukkot, informs us that during these seven days there were to be a total of seventy bulls offered.[5] The Sages of Israel describe these seventy sacrifices being offered for the "seventy nations"[6] or "seventy languages" that represent all of humanity.[7] Thus, the Sages teach that the seventy bulls were offered in the Temple as atonement for the seventy nations of the world.

This knowledge caused the Sages to declare, upon seeing the destruction of the Temple: "if the nations of the world had only known how much they needed the Temple, they would have surrounded it with armed fortresses to protect it".[8]

Thus, we can sense that inherent in the very nature of the holiday, there is an inexorable bond as expressed through its sacrificial requirements,

and links it to the Earth's peoples. The festival of Sukkot was and is mandated by the Creator Himself to be a holiday for all of humanity. May the Temple of Hashem be rebuilt speedily in our days!

Now, I would now like to take up another issue stated by the Christian missionary in the article "Dialogue with a Missionary." [9]

The missionary takes the position that the coming of the Messiah led to the destruction of the Temple. He also, seemingly takes the position that without the Temple, that there can be no forgiveness of sin. He then indicates that with the death of this so-called Messiah through his sufferings and death, he would eventually become a sin offering himself as a reason for the destruction of the Temple.

With the help of Hashem I would like to address these positions that he has presented for the destruction of

the Temple.

First, let us address the issue of why the Temple was destroyed. According to the opinion of the Sages of Israel, the Temple was destroyed as a result of baseless hatred and not as the result of the coming of the Messiah:

"But why was the second Sanctuary destroyed, seeing that in its time they were occupying themselves with Torah, [observance of] precepts, and the practice of charity? Because therein prevailed hatred without cause. That teaches you that groundless hatred is considered as even gravity with the three sins of idolatry, immorality, and bloodshed together". [10]

Also, if indeed the coming of the Messiah has, in anyway, a connection to the destruction of the Temple, why then did he not come when the Babylonians destroyed the first Temple?

Next, let us take up the issue of the inability of having one's sins forgiven without the Temple and the inability of being able to bring a sacrifice[11] for one's sins.

There is much that I would like to write about this issue but I shall limit my response, for it may not be appropriate for me to delve so deeply into this subject. Rather, let us turn to the Tanach and the Sages of Israel and let them address this issue.

King David in his Psalm of repentance[12] and the Sages of Israel reveal a wonderful truth. David states:

"For You do not desire a sacrifice, else I would have given it; a burnt-offering You do not want. The sacrifices of G-d are a broken spirit; a heart broken and humbled, O G-d, You will not despise." [13]

(continued on next page)

(continued from previous page)

Religions

The Sages of Israel comment on these amazing statements made by King David:

"R. Joshua b. Levi said; He who sacrifices his [evil] inclination and confesses [his sin] over it, Scripture imputes it to him as though he had honored the Holy One, blessed be He, in both worlds, this world and the next; for it is written, Whoso offereth the sacrifice of confession honoureth me."

"R. Joshua b. Levi also said: When the Temple was in existence, if a man brought a burnt offering, he received credit for a burnt offering; if a meal offering, he received credit for a meal offering; but he who was humble in spirit, Scripture regarded him as though he had brought all the offerings, for it is said, 'The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit.' And furthermore, his prayers are not despised, for it is written, 'A broken and contrite heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise'".[14]

"R. Joshua b. Levi said: 'Come and see how great are the lowly of spirit in the esteem of the Holy One, blessed be He, since when the Temple stood, a man brought a burnt-offering and received the reward of a burnt-offering, a meal-offering and he received the reward of a meal-offering; but as for him whose mind is lowly, Scripture ascribes it to him as though he had offered every one of the sacrifices', as it is said: 'The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit. More than that, his prayer is not despised; as it continues: A broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise'".[15]

Now I must tell you that based on the words of King David and the Sages of Israel, I have come to understand that one may have his sins forgiven - without a blood sacrifice. Even when the Temple is not standing and according to David's and the Sages' words, this is so even when the Temple is standing.

Not that I fully comprehend Hashem's system of sacrifices,[16] but as a former Christian I can tell you that Christianity has a distorted view of this system, and as such, carries this distortion over into their idea of a human sacrifice which Hashem has never condoned.

One thing we may surely come to realize from the words of David and the comments of the Sages and turn it to our hearts, is that forgiveness of sin may be had without a temple, and without a blood sacrifice.

Lastly, we have seen from the comments of the Sages that the destruction of the Temple did not occur by the coming of the Messiah, especially not from one who would suffer and shed his blood for the supposed atoning of someone's sins, or for that matter, the supposed atonement of the

sins of the world. Rather, the Temple's destruction came to be from hatred without a cause.[17]

We have also demonstrated from the Tanach and the Sages that the forgiveness of sin can be attained with or without the Temple standing, and without a blood sacrifice.

There is much to be said about the creation and greatness of repentance. I will only quote a couple of sources from the Sages of Israel:

"Yet was the fire of the Gehenna created on the eve of the Sabbath? Surely it was taught: Seven things were created before the world was created, and these are they: The Torah, repentance, the Garden of Eden, Gehenna, the Throne of Glory, the Temple, and the name of the Messiah".[18]

"It was taught: R Meir used to say, Great is repentance, for on account of an individual who repents, (does not need to die)[19] the sins of all the world are forgiven, as it is said: I will heal their backsliding. I will love them freely, for mine anger is turned away from him. 'From them' it is not said, but 'from him.'"[20] [21] □

[1] JewishTimes, Volume III, No. 39...Aug. 6, 2004

[2] I Kings 8:41-43

[3] Isaiah 56:7

[4] Zechariah 14:16-19

[5] Numbers 29

[6] Genesis 10

[7] Balvi. Succah 55b.

[8] Bamidbar Rabbah 1, 3, Balvi. Succah 55b

[9] Jewish Times, Volume III, No. 39...Aug. 6, 2004

[10] Balvi., Tractate Yoma 9b., Soncino Translation of the Talmud

[11] For an understanding the concept of Korban, see: "The Pentateuch", by Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch, Vayikra Chapter One, pp. 371-372.

[12] Psalms 51

[13] Psalms 51:18-19

[14] Balvi., Tractate Sanhedrin 43b., Soncino Translation of the Talmud

[15] Balvi., Tractate Sotah 5b., Soncino Translation of the Talmud

[16] For understanding the concept of Korban. See: "The Pentateuch", by Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch, Vayikra Chapter One, pp. 371-372.

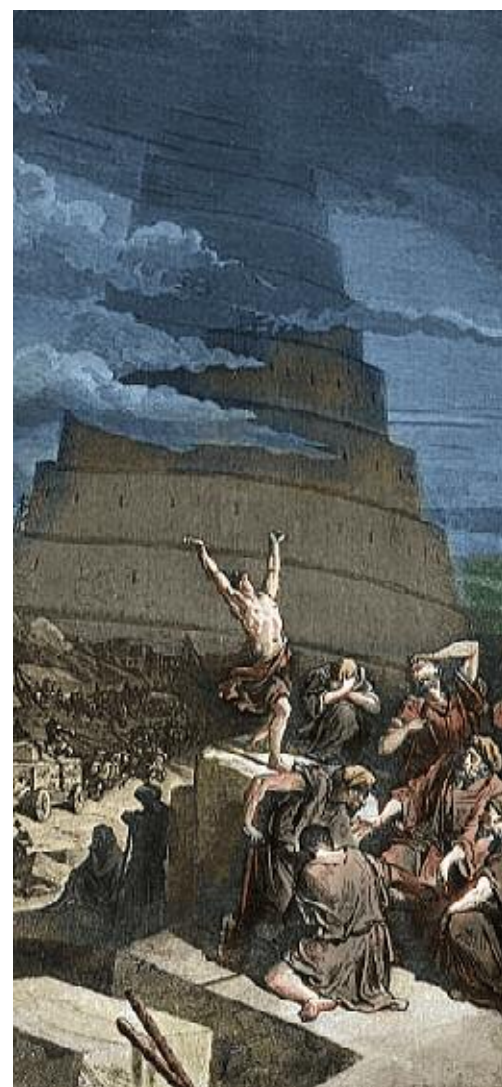
[17] Balvi., Tractate Yoma 9b., Soncino Translation of the Talmud

[18] Balvi., Peshchaim 54a.

[19] () Brackets are My comments

[20] Hosea 14:4

[21] Balvi., Yoma 86b.



Mesora thanks all of our contributors during our recent Rosh Hashannah fund raiser.

Your support continues to sustain our site and makes the JewishTimes possible each week.

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

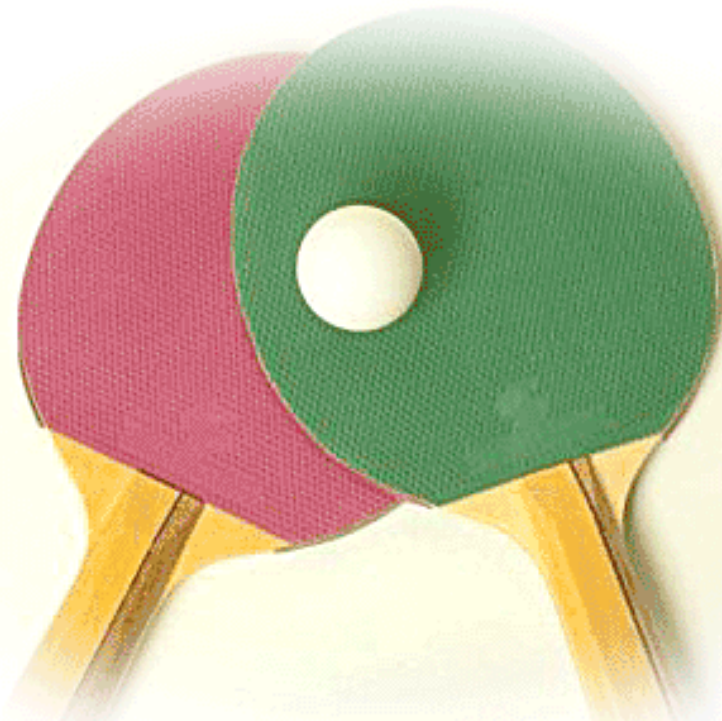
Guilt

DOUG TAYLOR & RABBI MORTON MOSKOWITZ

"If guilt can be measured in gallons, I have an oil tanker full," I said as the white sphere, moving at slightly under warp six, streaked three inches past my face. "Why is that?" asked my friend, the King of Rational Thought. "I don't know," I replied, picking up the Ping-Pong ball and marveling at how a physical object could move so fast through space and not disintegrate. "I guess I was just born guilty." "Hmmm," he said, casually. "That doesn't sound very precise." "8-1. Your serve. What do you mean?" "Just that. You're feeling guilty, yet you don't know why? You have no idea?" "OK," I said, as we rallied again. "Here are some examples. I don't feel like I work hard enough at my job. I don't feel like I spend enough time with my kids. I don't feel like I work in the yard as much as I should." "And," I said with a grimace as I attempted to slam the return down his throat, "I haven't waxed my car in three months." I missed the end of the table. 9-1. "I see," he said. "Tell me. What is the purpose of guilt?" "Huh? The purpose of guilt? Well it's to let you know when you've done something wrong. It's to make you feel guilty when you've been bad. It's your conscience telling you when you've messed up." Why was he asking me this? Isn't guilt obvious? "Is guilt an emotion?" he queried. "Well, sure," I replied. "So are you saying that an emotion is the yardstick by which you measure the correctness of your behavior?" he asked, spinning the ball so expertly that I swear it did a U-turn when it hit my side of the table. I swung and missed. 10-1. "But you can't ignore your conscience," I protested. "Besides, wasn't it some great philosopher who said 'let your conscience be your guide'?" He raised an eyebrow. "That was Jiminy Cricket in Pinocchio." "Oh." "Look," he said. "Let me offer a radical suggestion. The only valid

purpose of guilt is to prompt you to investigate - with your rational mind - whether or not you did the right thing. That's all. Beyond that, guilt is just another emotion that clouds your view of reality. Guilt is by no means a measure of whether you did something wrong. You should know by now that you can't rely on your emotions to determine whether you've acted properly or not. People have all kinds of misplaced guilt. Take you, for instance." "What about me?" "How many hours did you work last week?" "Uh, oh about 70." "And you're feeling guilty that you should have worked harder?" "Well-" "And didn't you tell me that you spent all last weekend on a camping trip with your kids?" "Well, yeah, but-" "And the week before that, you took them to the county fair?" "Yes, but I-" "And didn't you tell me that your yard won some kind of neighborhood gardening award?" "Yeah,

but my wife did most of the work-" "No offense, but I'd say you have a whole oil tanker full of misplaced guilt. You've got to measure your actions in terms of relevant standards. Remember, the only purpose of guilt is to prompt you to make a rational investigation. The sole question to be answered is, did I do the right thing? The rest of guilt you can toss." He leaned over the table at me. "And by all means," he said intently, "do not let your conscience be your guide. Let your rational mind be your guide. That's why you have it." He served and I attempted a grand slam return. The move worked, but I dipped too low and my paddle put a long scratch in the table. "2-10," I said triumphantly. "My serve. Now, just to apply everything we've been talking about, do you think I should feel guilty about the scratch I just put in the table?" "No" he replied. "Why not?" He laughed. "It's your table." ■



RED BENDEL

Principles the

CONTRADICTS

JESSIE FISCHBEIN

No Powers other than Hashem:

- Devarim 4:35. Unto you it was shown, that you might know that the LORD, He is G-d; there is none else beside Him.
- Jeremiah 9:23. But let him that glories glory in this, that he understands, and knows Me, that I am the LORD who exercises mercy, justice, and righteousness, in the earth; for in these things I delight, saith the LORD.

Metzudas Dovid, a commentary: Know Me—that I am Hashem and there is no other besides Me, and I am the One who does chessed to those who love Me and keep my commandments and I am the One who does justice to punish the wicked and I am the One who does righteousness to accept the repentant and to remove judgment from them, and not G-d forbid that there is a force of good and a force of evil, because I desire all of these—to give each person what he deserves and the one who understands this, it is appropriate to praise himself, because through this [understanding] he will derive great benefit.

- Isaiah 45:14. There is none else other than G-d.
- Isaiah 45:21. Declare, and bring them near, yea, let them take counsel together: Who has announced this from ancient time, and declared it of old? Isn't it that I am the LORD, and there is no G-d else beside Me, a just G-d and a Savior; there is none beside Me.
- Isaiah 45:22. Look to Me, and be saved, all the ends of the earth; for I am G-d, and there is none else.
- Isaiah 46:9. Remember the former things of old: that I am G-d, and there is none else; I am G-d, and there is none like Me;

Note: the word for “G-d” is “E-L,” which means “power.”

These verses clearly state that Hashem is the only one who determines a judgment of good and evil. Other than the laws of nature that Hashem established, there are no other powers.

Objects have No Powers:

Maimonides, hilchos mezuzah 5:4:

Those who write inside the mezuzah names of angels or holy names or a verse or engravings, they are included with those who have no share in the world to come. Because these fools, it's not enough that they are nullifying a mitzvah, but they are making a great mitzvah—which is the Oneness of the Name of the Holy One, blessed be He, and His love and His service—into an amulet for their own benefit as it occurs to their foolish hearts that this kind of nonsense thing can benefit them.

Leviticus 19:31:

Turn not unto the soothsayers, nor to familiar spirits; seek them not out, to be defiled by them: I am the LORD your G-d.

Ibn Ezra: This is a decree of knowledge that they are seeking the future. And people empty of brains said that even though the soothsayers are true (i.e. have real power) and also magic, the torah forbade them. And I say the opposite: the torah does not forbid the truth! Only falsehood!

Reward and Punishment

Deuteronomy 32:4:

The Rock, His work is perfect; for all His ways are justice; a G-d of faithfulness and without iniquity, just and right is He.

Red string contradicts the principle of “schar v'onesh”, reward and punishment. If a person deserves to be punished, how can a red string save them? If a person doesn't deserve punishment, and isn't wearing a red string, what kind of G-d hurts them because they're not wearing a string?

(continued on next page)

True Spiritual Protectors

Teshuva, tefilla, u'tzedaka ma'avirin es Roa ha'gzeira
Repentance, prayer, and charity remove the evil decree

Maimonides hilchos mezuzah 6:13

The early Wise Ones said "Whoever has tefillin on his head and arm, tzitzis on his clothing, and a mezuzah on his door, he is strengthened not to sin, because he has many reminders, and these are the angels that protect him from sin as it says (Psalms 34:8)

"The angel of the LORD encamps around them that fear Him, and delivers them."

Nowhere in Tanach or in the Talmud do people use a red string to protect themselves.



Oral Law Prohibiting the Red Bendel

Tosefta Shabbos Chapter 7:

These things are "from the ways of the Emorim" (i.e., behavior of idolators): one who cuts his hair "koomi" (i.e., like the idolators), and one who makes a plait (locks worn by Roman or Greek youth or upper classes) and offers it to the gods, one who raises her child between the dead, one who ties a cushion to his hip (a superstitious custom), or a red string to his finger, and one who appoints and throws rocks to the sea or the river, these are idolatrous behaviors; one who and claps and dances to the fire, this is idolatrous behavior.

Ayin Hara (Evil Eye) Discussed in the Torah

- Genesis 42:5, Rashi. 10 sons of Jacob entered separate gates to avoid ayin hara
- Genesis 49:22, Rashi. Fish aren't subject to ayin hara (this is a metaphor: because they are in a different environment. People aren't jealous of people that there is no identification with.)
- Samuel 1,18:9. After David killed more Philistines than King Saul and the people sang a derogatory song about it, the verse said that Saul looked badly at David from that day on. Rashi comments: ayin hara.
- Tractate Berachot - 20a. R' Yochanan—Yosef's descendants are not subject to ayin hara (based on Yosef not being destroyed by his brothers' jealousy)
- Tractate Bava Batra - 141a. Having a girl prevents ayin hara
- Tractate Bava Batra - 2b. (mid page, Rashi) Don't stand in field with full grown crops, so that he won't be damaged by ayin hara.

Ayin Hara can be explained as people's jealousy and all of the natural horrible consequences of that. It is not a supernatural phenomenon. We say at the end of Shemona Esrei: "To those who curse me, let my soul be silent, and let my soul be like dust to everyone (i.e., don't let them have ayin hara, jealousy)."

Be Wholehearted with Hashem

Deuteronomy 18:9-13:

When you come into the land, which the LORD your G-d gives you, do not learn to do after the abominations of those nations. There shall not be found among you any one that makes his son or his daughter to pass through the fire, one that uses divination (fortune teller), a soothsayer (psychic), or an enchanter (superstition), or a sorcerer, or a charmer, or one that consults a ghost or a familiar spirit (séance), or a necromancer. For whoever does these things is an abomination unto the LORD; and because of these abominations the LORD thy G-d is driving them out from before you. You shall be whole-hearted with the LORD your G-d.

Rashi: Go after Hashem completely and put your hopes in Him and do not chase after the futures (fortune telling, etc.); rather, whatever will happen to you accept with wholeness and then you will be His nation and His portion.

Superstitions crop up to "protect" us from things that we have no control over: health, shidduchim, beauty, safety of our children, and financial success. It is terrifying to have no control. The "Am Hashem," Hashem's nation, does not seek to deal with the insecurity by turning to objects with powers to protect us. ■