



"Would it be that My people listen to me, if Israel would go in My ways,
I would subdue their enemies in a instant, and turn My hand against their foes."

King David, Psalm 81

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of Jewish Beliefs and Practices

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Torah is Joy

RABBI REUVEN MANN

We read in the Hagadda: Rabbi Eliezer Ben Azaria said, I am as a seventy year old and did not understand why we mention the Exodus every night until Ben Zoma explained etc. The main subject of this paragraph is the Talmudic debate regarding the proper interpretation of "All the days of your life" which pertain to the recitation of the Shema. We may ask; what is the purpose of introducing a halachik discussion with Rabbi Eliezer's revelation about his age? Of what significance is it that he did not learn the reason for a certain observance until he was seventy?

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Judging People Superficially

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

In today's society, an extremely large amount of value and concern is placed on how one looks and dresses. Jews sinfully categorize their own brothers and sisters into superficial categories; "Does he wear a black jacket or hat?" "What type of yarmulke does he wear?" "Does she wear jeans skirts?" With anguish, I have heard that this nonsense has spread from personal characteristics, to amenities of the home, such as table coverings. Do people really believe that G-d felt that garments, or anything other than the person's values and midos should carry any weight? Further, one violates a halacha d'oraisa (positive command) of "Viahavta l'racha comocha" ("thou shall love thy neighbor as thyself") when one passes judgment or prevents a shidduch if one is a convert, divorced, not Sephardic or Ashkenaz, and the like. This is clearly a despicable trait, one which must immediately be removed from one's value system, regardless of others who may disagree.

As always, when one desires to follow what is in accord with the Torah, one must look into the sources, not to what people say, or what is popularly believed or performed.

Who did King David, and King Solomon descend from? Ruth the Moabite. Who did Joshua marry? Rachav the harlot. Who did Moshe Rabbeinu marry? Zippora - a woman whose father practiced every form of idolatry. Ruth partook of greatness, as she exemplified modesty to such a high degree. G-d therefore selected her to be the mother of our greatest kings. Did G-d rebuke Moshe or Joshua for marrying people with such backgrounds? At the time of marriage, these individuals were living the correct philosophy. That is all G-d is concerned with. In Genesis 21:17, Rashi states this point clearly: "The

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ASK YOUR CHILDREN:

"Should we look for the bad or the good in others, and why?"
Have your children email us with their answers: questions@mesora.org

Peace and Love

RIVKA OLENICK

Hillel said: "Be of the disciples of Aaron, loving peace and pursuing peace, loving the created beings, and bringing them near to the Torah." (Avos, Chapter 1:12)

There are many people who feel tremendous guilt because they sin and have difficulty overcoming their sins. And others may know of their sins and judge them harshly and unfairly. We all sin - so why should we think that the sins of another are so much worse than our own? What does it mean to be the disciples of Aaron? In Pirkei Avos, God says of Aaron: "He walked with Me in peace and uprightness, and he turned many away from sin." Hillel said of Aaron: "When he would feel or hear that a person had wickedness within him, or that he would commit sins, Aaron would always greet him first, become friendly with him, and speak with him frequently."

Aaron was a compassionate person and looked past a person's sins to find that person's essence. How was Aaron able to find the person's essence? This is difficult. Most people are looking to find a person's sins and poor character traits, not their essence and then they use those sins and flaws to taunt that person. People do this conveniently through humor and sarcasm. "As a madman who throws firebrands, arrows, and death and then says: 'I am only joking.' King Solomon from Proverbs 26:18-19 (death here refers to loshon hora - as speech kills.) Nevertheless, this is a quick way to categorize the other person negatively and you purposely avoid finding his essence, his true self - you choose to see only his sins.

How was Aaron able to greet the sinner, become friendly with him and speak with him frequently? Why did Aaron choose this method? Isn't it true that when we choose to look past a person's sins and show sincerity and interest in the person - the person, begins to speak from the heart and starts to feel lifted - because someone else cares. At the same time the person feels guilt. However, a little guilt is good because it acts as a motivator. The guilt motivates the person to feel shame and embarrassment over their sins. "Oh, if he found out how much I really sinned - he would have nothing to do with me ever. Now is my chance to prove that I can overcome my sins, repent and be respected." Every person wants to be respected. No one wants to be "imprisoned" by sin.

Aaron pursued peace which seems logical and rational, but why should one love peace? Why was Aaron called a lover of peace? Why did he choose this very compassionate way of drawing another person near to him? This very compassionate way is what causes peace between people. And the way Aaron pursued this peace proved he was a lover of peace. And one who loves peace also loves created beings. Because in order to love peace and pursue peace you need to have who to love and pursue it with.

God created all human beings to live their life with the highest purpose. For the Jewish person it is to bring others near to the Torah - through the peaceful ways of the commandments, ways that promote love and unity between people. Not ways of judgment and harshness, or cruelty and indifference. The same ways of love and peace that we are asked to use to "love your neighbor as yourself" which also creates unity. We were all created for the same purpose, which is to be the teachers of Torah and to be the light unto all the nations. This is our real job. God in His great wisdom gave us a purpose, and by giving us His Torah He allows us to fulfill this purpose and help others to do the same, by bringing them near to Torah. ■

Torah is Joy

RABBI REUVEN MANN

(continued from page 1)

The world of Torah constitutes a universe unto itself, distinct from any other field of intellectual endeavor. The objective of the secular scholar is to achieve a certain level of expertise which enables him to reap the practical benefits of being regarded as an "authority". He is therefore at his most creative in his younger years. His energies are directed toward innovative and progressive approaches. However at a certain point he ceases to investigate and begins to disseminate. His ideas assume a fixed form. The desire to learn new things is replaced by the complacent feeling that "there is no reason to study what you already know."

Complacency is antithetical to Torah. The Talmid Chacham never loses his youthful inquisitiveness and delights in discovering new insights. This goes together with a certain intellectual humbleness. Torah is so vast and profound that even a genius at an advanced age can be stumped on a basic point. This is what Rabbi Eliezer wanted to convey. He was a great Talmid Chacham and was already seventy. Yet he had not lost his youthful desire for knowledge and openness to the ideas of others. Thus he wanted to express his excitement upon learning the drasha of Ben Zoma. This lesson is very relevant to the holiday of Shavuot. It reminds us that the greatest gift G-d has bestowed on us is the Torah. Judaism is more than a body of rules and regulations that govern every aspect of personal and communal life. It is a system of concepts, a body of knowledge and a method of analysis which enables us to access the most significant truths that enlighten our existence.

We must, therefore, cultivate the proper attitude toward Torah. Laziness must be overcome. Effort, consistency and steadfastness are required. Age should never be an issue. Rabbi Akiva was an ignorant shepherd until the age of forty. He went on to become one of the greatest Sages of our history. He exemplifies the principle that at any point in one's life enormous and unimaginable gain can be derived from Talmud Torah. Rabbi Eliezer Ben Azaria was a great scholar whose love of learning only increased with age. These role models demonstrate that Judaism, unlike any other religion, is not only about duty, responsibility and sacrifice. It is about the profound joy of perceiving the wonders of G-d's Torah

and becoming a partner with the Almighty in fulfilling His plan for the Jewish people and all mankind. The true student of Torah who appreciates its sublime beauty never really ages. He remains forever young. □

Referencing God

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

The very last sentence in parshas Naso (Numbers 7:89) reads, "And when Moses went into the Tent of Meeting to speak with him and he heard the voice speaking to him from atop the Kaporets on the Ark of testimony from between the two cherubim speaking to him."

Who is the first "him" referring to? It makes no mention of anyone previously in the chapter. Additionally, this passage seems out of context. As the preceding verses are dealing with the twelve princes' offerings, why does it state that Moses spoke with "him" immediately following the sacrifices of the Tabernacle's inauguration?

It's clear that the "him" mentioned is referring to God, as there is no one else in the Tabernacle when Moses entered. Why then did God go out of the way and avoid using a direct reference to His name? God could have written, "And when Moses went into the Tent of Meeting to speak with God...."

I believe God changed the word here to teach us that this is the one geographical location where there is no mistaking that this is pertaining exclusively to God. When in the tabernacle, the term "Him" suffices to teach Who Moses was talking with. It is only "God's House". It is impossible to refer to any other being in this location, as it is exclusively God's domain, "And make for Me a temple and I will dwell among you". (Lev. 25:8). The Torah therefore points to this exclusivity by using the term "Him" in place of the name God.

What then is the importance of our knowing this fact, that this place is exclusively God's? Perhaps the answer is that there is no one else who could be responsible for being the source of wisdom - the definition of the Tabernacle and Temple. As the ark is the focus of the Tabernacle, its definition then stems from the Ark's unique distinction as the Torah's

container. Additionally, Moses heard the voice emanating from between the two cherubim which is directly above the Ark to embellish on the point that such prophecy was directly from God, the Creator of the Torah. Perhaps for this reason, miracles surrounded the Ark which housed the Torah - the object of God's exclusive creation which He made before the universe. Through miracles, the Ark was intimately tied to the Divinity of Torah as it housed both it and the ten Commandments. The Ten Commandments also carried the miraculous feature of being written legibly from both sides of each tablet - one of the objects mentioned as being created on the primordial Friday at sunset. (See my article on this topic: All Miracles Were Part of Creation). Miracles then seem to be used in connection with the Ark to underline the Torah's Divine nature and origin.

Why is the term "the voice" used, and not "God's voice?" Simply put, God has no voice. Meaning, we don't find statements which attribute corporeality to God. A passage such as "God's voice....." referring to actual verbalization - not a message - is impossible for the Torah to state, as it implies human qualities. (An acceptable instance would be something like "listen to His voice", meaning, follow His commands. Such a statement is not conveying that God has a voice, so it does not oppose Torah principles.)

The reason this verse comes right after the completion of the inaugural sacrifices is to teach that the sacrifices are not the essential aspect of the Tabernacle and the future Temple. The essence of these structures' purposes is that man have a connection with God - the Source of all knowledge. To demonstrate this, God wrote that Moses spoke with Him subsequent to the sacrifices to show the real goal of the Temple. If this parsha concluded with the sacrifices, one might be led to believe an inherent importance to sacrifice as an ends. Really, sacrifice is a means. Knowledge of God, Torah study is the goal of the Torah. See Talmud Moad Katan, 9b at the very top of the page where Torah and mitzvos are compared by Rav Shimon bar Yochai's students, questioning which is the preferred activity.

(See my article on the Tabernacle where I explained that the articles contained in the Holy of Holies serve to illustrate that in these four objects, we witness God's exclusive, ultimate knowledge.) □

Masses Prove Nothing

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

We must not be impressed by people - be they masses, or an individual.

Quite often we will find individuals who follow an idea, or an activity, and claim it is part of the Torah. We should not be guided by numbers or by reputation. Who determines what is part of the Torah? The "Masters of the Tradition" or the Baalei HaMesora. These would include such great individuals as Rashi, Maimonides, and Nachmanides, and many others on their level.

When Korach revolted, had the Jews said, "He (Korach) is right! He is a leader.", the Jews would have been guilty. And we see that Korach didn't die alone. Other followers met with his same fate. Today as well, if some great scholar tells us to perform palm reading, we positively declare that the act is Avodah Zara, regardless of the person's reputation. Such an act, the Rambam outlines in Hilchos Avodah Zarah, and is considered idol worship. Fortune tellers are forms of Avodah Zarah.

We find an area in the Torah informing us of a Navi Sheker, a false prophet. He can be the greatest Jew ever to have lived, but if he says something in Hashem's name falsely, he is put to death. We don't pay any attention to who he was. Similarly, an Eir Hanidachas, a city which wholly follow idols - is completely wiped out. If we say that when many Jews do something, it must be right, how could the Torah say to kill these people? Evidently, the Torah does not pay attention to how important a person is, or to how many people follow a specific act. If it is clearly prohibited, or punishable with death, then the penalty must be meted out. Again, if we see in our society today many Jews following an act such as wearing red bendels to guard against ayin harah, we don't care that thousands follow this false belief. (Tosefta Shabbos, Chap. 7 clearly prohibits this practice). The Rambam states clearly in the Yad Hachazaka, that individuals who write the names of Malachim, angels, on the mezuzah, they don't only lose a share in the world to come, but they take a command which incorporates the most fundamental of ideas, the Unity of G-d, and wrongly make it into a personal amulet to guard their physical bodies.

We must always consult the Rabbis and the Torah (not the masses) to determine what is considered Torah. □

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Invite God to the Peace Talks

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

Dr. Keyes,

Please accept my commendation for sticking to your guns, speaking pointedly, with an unrelenting pursuit of the truth, and direct answers to your important questions. You are slowly peeling away the decades of lies, the layers of facades masking the evildoers, and exposing the killers' true, ugly faces. I sincerely hope our continuous web and print publication of your remarks and philosophy will generate growing viewership for your essential format.

Considering recent events, this whole lock horn debate between Israel and the murderous Palestinians is rooted in a very basic error, one which the media has not yet touched upon. I refer to "Church and state". Thankfully, separation of church and state is not followed by many of us here, as we pledge "...one nation under God..." Separation of church and state is illogical and wrong, for a country cannot propose a set of ideals - calling them "objective truths" - without a valid definition of "objective".

What determines "objective" morality?

Without the proof of God's plan for man - the singular Bible system given at Sinai 3314 years ago - there is no means for validating one morality over another. The demonstrable proof of the event at Sinai outlined "objective good", and "objective evil". The proof of that event is the same proof which exists for all historical events - it was attended by masses, and it manifested easily perceptible phenomena. These two elements rule out fabrication and ignorance respectively, thereby leaving only one possibility - the event transpired, and God indeed gave man a singular system for life. With that historically proven event, the Bible and God's will for man are simultaneously, undoubtedly proven. As an event proven 100% true, accompanied by the divine text of the Bible, God's system then becomes the singular, objective system of truth, justice and morality.

Just as we adhere to medical practices proven successful, so also the Bible must be adhered to, since it too was proven. By force of reason - our only means of function - we must remain consistent in our thinking, using the exact same methodology of "proof" as is engaged by science. Religion operates no differently than science. Both are creations of the Creator. The same depth of knowledge, the same precision and rationality are woven into both. It is foolish and inconsistent to think otherwise.

But perhaps politicians fear marring their political image by incorporating words like "religion", "God", or "Bible" into their

platform. Perhaps they fear being labeled "religious fanatic", or less, they fear jeopardizing their lofty posts. For a true leader, one who desires the ultimate good for his fellow man, reason must be his only guide. Reason dictates we study God's plan for man. The Creator of the universe, the Creator of mankind surely knows better than a lowly human what is best for His creation, for man. Any political platform devoid of God's knowledge imparted through His system of truths - the Bible - is a path based on man's feeble and warped mind. Surely God related to man a far superior plan. Surely the world's Designer informed man of the only accurate, undiluted, undistorted knowledge base required for mankind to approach all areas of life - including national issues.

To determine what is good for mankind - now more than ever - we must engage rationale to prove what God's plan is for man.

If we wish objective good for all mankind, inviting God's into the peace talks with the right participants must no longer be avoided. If we leave Him out, such a grave distortion will hasten more bin-Ladens and Arafats, and their freedom to kill. □

How Judaism Differs from Other Religions

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

Reader: Is it Jewish belief that separates Jews, or is it practice, and how?

Mesora: What separates the Jewish religion from all other religions is primarily it's proof of Divine origin as demonstrated through God's revelation of Himself to all the Jews at Mount Sinai. This was witnessed by approximately 3 million Jews as an intelligent voice speaking to them from the fiery mountain. No other religion makes such a claim because Divine revelation to the masses never happened to others, and as the Torah says, it will never happen again. (Deut. 4:32-34)

Judaism is the only religion whose claim is supported by world acceptance of the Old Testament, the Five Books of Moses, the Torah. This acceptance is a 100% proof of God's revelation to the Jewish people. Had the event at Sinai never occurred, it would not have been believed by that generation, and certainly not the rest of the world and all future generations. The only way it became accepted is that it really happened. All witnesses then passed the story down to the following generations through today.

All other religions are founded on a single person's claim that God appeared to

him. Something of this nature cannot be proven or disproven, is precisely why they formulated their religions with this creed as their central basis. These other religions therefore must resort to the requirement of blind acceptance, or faith.

Besides this miraculous proof, Judaism is founded on principles which are rational and comply with man's nature as a philosophical and psychological being. Not one law in all of Judaism goes against man's nature. Unlike Catholicism which frowns upon divorce, and praises celibacy, Judaism embraces the need at times for married couples to divorce if they will be happier that way, and Judaism also embraces man's need for sexual happiness and children. These are just two examples of how Judaism approaches life honestly, without preconceived notions on how man should live. Catholicism makes man into a mystical idea approaching their view of an angel, one who is above actual human drives and emotions. This opposes Judaism at its core. Judaism accepts man's happiness must stem from his being in line with his nature.

Judaism realizes that besides man satisfying his psychological needs, he has a much higher part which must be addressed - his soul. By man ignoring this essential part of his nature, he will never reach his ultimate, Divine mission of attaching himself to God. Man achieves this mission and thereby - ultimate happiness - by his immersion in study of the creation and Torah, actualizing his true goal and purpose in an appreciation of the Creator. The Torah, Prophets and Writings, along with the Talmud, were written in a highly stylized format which takes years to master. Their style is such, that as one delves deeper and deeper, he finds more profound ideas. This analysis and search satisfies man in its very process, as well as through factual enlightenment. As God possesses infinite wisdom, man will always see new insights provided he has toiled under the tutelage of those before him trained in the method of Talmudic and Biblical exegesis, teamed with the essential modes of interpretations only found in the Oral Law - also handed to Moses on Sinai.

The system of Jewish law - halacha - is also a major component of Judaism. It guides man's every action from waking and prayers, to blessings over food, ethical and moral conduct, business practices, social relationships, and Holidays. Areas of man's life are always placed in check as he judges each of his actions for Torah compliance prior to commencement. This process engages man's mind throughout his days when he is not involved in study - which must comprise the majority of his waking hours.

In truth, there is no comparison between the Divinely designed system of Judaism and other man made religions for this precise reason that there is no comparison between God and man.

This of course is a very small glimpse into Judaism. A more encompassing appreciation of God's wisdom is only possible through much more study. □

Praying to the Dead

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

Reader: I see through all that garbage when Edwards is on TV. What I don't understand is why so many people fall for it? On the other hand how different is going to visit relatives and great Rabbi's "kevers" and praying at their tombstones?

Mesora: We are not supposed to pray at their graves, unless the prayer is directed to God alone. Otherwise, it is also as you say a form of contacting the dead.

Reader: A few years ago a member of our community in New York passed away and a "chasishe" Rabbi led the procession with the "aron" to the plot where the burial was to take place. Upon reaching the first tombstone in that block the Rabbi stopped the procession and took out a hammer from his pocket and knocked three times on that tombstone and apologized for disturbing the dead. And what about the thousands of our people who travel to Eastern Europe and Russia to visit and pray at the grave site of famous Rabbis? Could this constitute NECROMANCY?

Mesora: It could be. We must know, God hears our prayers everywhere. Similarly, inserting kaputls into the Western Wall is also contrary to the pasuk at the end of Parshas Yisro, "b'kol makom asher azkir es shmi, avo alecha uvarachticha", "in all places where My name is mentioned, I will come to you and bless you".

However, if one is inspired by visiting the graves of the righteous, that is permissible, and it may even have a long lasting positive effect on this person. Calev went to the graves of the patriarchs upon the initial entrance to Israel, to remind himself of the reality of God's promise of the land to those patriarchs. Their reality of their burial plots in front of his eyes strengthened the reality of God's promise of the land, as these individual were the recipients of the promise. As if to say, "If they are real, then so is God's word."

Calev never doubted that the patriarchs were real, but he understood human psychology. Now being confronted with the corrupt spies attempting to deny God's promise of a victory against the current inhabitants of Israel, Calev desired to harness all aspects of his personality to counter the emotional pull of the spies. Laying his eyes upon their graves added another component of emotional stability to Calev's position.

But, he did not pray to the forefathers.

In no way do we pray to people, alive or dead. □

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Judging People Superficially

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

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angels approached G-d and said, this person's (Ishmael) seed is destined to kill your children through thirst, and you are creating a well for him? G-d responded, What is his level now, righteous or evil? They (the angels) responded, he is righteous. G-d then said, then this is how he will be judged - as righteous".

From whom should we learn our ideas? From the foolish people of today, who, if Ruth were alive, they would not accept because she is a convert? Or, perhaps, we should follow what G-d values?

King Solomon in Proverbs constantly describes peoples' psychological and philosophical mistakes, but then offers insight into resolving the problem. It is important not only to define a problem, but to offer insight into its roots, so as to eradicate it. The concern here is to awaken people to their blindly accepted views which should be cast aside quickly, as they only serve to create discord, and not peace. Categorization of people by dress or other superficial means is nothing more than another permutation of the "private club" emotion - a view which a rational, G-d fearing Jew should not ascribe to. Casting another human being aside saying "he's not good enough for me, my son my daughter,...", merely based on dress or history alone, ignoring their values, is in reality a way for one to tell himself that he is better than this person. Degrading another is only done to elevate oneself. A philosophically corrupt activity, and clearly against halacha. A person's own insecurity with his views breeds this. One who is secure need not care about how others view him. The righteous person's intent is to please G-d, no one else. Self aggrandizement is not the goal of the Torah. Kindness is. Righteousness is. "Havei dan es kol adam l'caf z'chus". "Judge everyone favorably".

If we look further into the Torah itself, we do not see where G-d or the forefathers ever placed value on dress.

We see that one of the most perfected people ever to live, Jacob, gave a gift of a coat of striped colors (Radak, Gen. 37:3) to his son Joseph. Joseph as well didn't abstain from wearing that garment. Both Jacob and Joseph realized that there is nothing harmful in anyway about wearing a colored garment. Had Jacob known the outcome of demonstrating his favoritism towards Joseph in this

manner, perhaps he would not have expressed it. But this does not mean that Jacob felt that the garment per se was a problem - the reaction of the brothers was the unforeseen problem. The priests as well are even commanded to wear colored garments.

We find in Exodus 12:35, upon the exodus from Egypt, the Jews asked the Egyptian's for their garments, and we do not see any criticism for this. Rashi even points out that the clothing was valued to the Jews more than the gold and silver vessels. If specific clothing must be worn according to the Torah, how could the Jews collect the clothing of their oppressors without critique? It would seem that there is no inherent problem in wearing other types of garments, even those of other nations (as long as the garments are not of religious practice).

How then do we understand the statement of the Rabbis that the Jews didn't change their language, their names or their clothing while in Egypt? This seems to oppose what we have just posited.

We may answer the following: Identification as a people is a good, as it shields against assimilation. The Jews in Egypt had no means of identification other than through language, clothing and names. The wearing of Egyptian clothing would have represented a loosening of their identity. Upon their exit however, the wearing of Egyptian clothing no longer posed a threat of assimilation, as the Egyptians were defeated, the Jews did not desire to identify with them.

In Samuel I, 1:16, G-d tells Samuel to go to Jesse, for "He (G-d) has seen a king for Himself among his sons". Interestingly, G-d does not tell Samuel which son. Why? G-d desired that Samuel also learn a lesson simultaneously with G-d's selection of the new king. Upon Samuel's arrival at the house of Jesse, Samuel sees Eliav. G-d tells Samuel "do not look at his appearance or his height, for he is despised, for it is not as man sees. Mans sees with his eyes, but G-d sees what's in the heart." Again, G-d is teaching us not to pay attention to the superficial information quickly assumed with the eyes. This is not the real person. The person, as G-d says, is what is in the heart.

In Zephania, 1:8, certain Jews were punished by G-d due to their wearing of "malbish nachri" (foreign or strange garments). The Radak offers, in his final interpretation, that the sin of those Jews was that "these men made themselves to look separate and righteous, and they wore strange garments, unlike the rest of their brethren, so that they should be

recognized through their clothing as distinct individuals, but their ways are evil". The Radak clearly states that one is doing evil when he tries to externalize his righteousness. One's religious relationship is with G-d. This is the only Being to impress. If however, one feels that he must impress people, and do an act of wearing a garment to demonstrate his level, this is evil and evidently punishable.

G-d knows what is the perfect system for man, and included in the Torah only those commands which - if followed exactly - will yield the only perfect life. Any addition or subtraction is a defect in the system. Did the Creator of the heavens and Earth, Who designed every aspect of the human personality, miss a point? Did He forget to include something in the Torah? Of course this is absurd. So it stands to reason that if there is no mention of commands to wear specific garments, it is not necessary, and even destructive. If G-d didn't include it in His Torah, who are we, to quote King Solomon, who "come after the King", to say that something new is important, when G-d Himself didn't say so? This is arrogance at its extreme.

Hashem said not to add onto the Torah or detract from it. G-d understands the religious emotion very well. He therefore bade us not to add to the Torah. G-d knew that man operates with emotions, and will project his own feelings, and try to be over-religious. However, one cannot lead a more religious life than the life which the Creator outlined for us.

We should follow the saying, "Maaseh Avos, siman l'banim", "acts of the forefathers are signs for the children". Let us follow Moshe Rabbeinu, Joshua, Jacob, and G-d, and ignore surface information. We should look only at the person's values, not at one's physical appearance. Are they G-d fearing, performers of charity and justice? Torah followers? It is these criteria alone that we should form decisions, if we must form a decision. Let us not act foolishly and condemn another human being, a fellow Jew, when he is not opposing G-d. We would not enjoy persecution based that which is immaterial. We should then be this sensitive to our fellow Jew, "thou shall love thy neighbor as thyself". Let us follow the example which G-d set with Ruth, as He judged her for her level of righteousness.

Imagine how much more peace there would be if we studied the Torah and kept to the teachings without distortion or projection, instead of operating out of false, destructive

notions. We would have more ahava (love) towards one another. Remember why G-d destroyed Noah's generation, and sustained the generation of the dispersion. As Rashi stated, "great is love, and hated is argument". We must stop fabricating false categories about our own brothers and sisters. It has gone on too long. Instead of looking for reasons to degrade a Jew, look for reasons to love someone and appreciate their real worth.

A person is what's inside - not what's outside. □

Plural Truths

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

Frankly, your Home Page is quite pedantic and need not be. To profess to be the sole voice on these matters as you have is often viewed by even those who are sympathetic as intolerant and puerile.

You need not say that you alone decide right from wrong. Why don't you say Mesora provides a perspective that shows the relevance of the Torah and Gemara in our quotidian lives? There will always be more than one interpretation of the scriptures and each generation finds its own relevance from the richness of Judaism. Freedom to discuss, reinterpret and find new meaning and relevance in Judaism is what has sustained us as a people for 3,000 years. It is our common story not our common beliefs that bind us together. When we pray we affirm that all of us came out of Egypt together not that we speak with one truth - in fact there are many.

Mesora: Your comments are not in line with reason, as the human mind sees something as true or false, or it admits ignorance. Our Sages exemplify this behavior. They did not subscribe to the opinion that there is plurality in truth. They in fact state emphatically their sides of arguments, many times deriding their opponent in debate. They did not say their opponent was also stating a truth.

If in fact you are true to your opinion, then you also must accept mine. But you see that will lead you to a contradiction, thereby showing internally that both sides cannot be correct.

For this very reason, I state on our homepage my intent to arrive at what I see as truth. Additionally, bringing in elements of our history and what keeps us together is irrelevant when deciding truth.