



Pharaoh's astrologers find their counterpart in today's horoscopists, psychics and fortune tellers. Just as we explain the latter as charlatans, so too were those in Pharaoh's court. We explain why in this issue.

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Weekly Parsha

Shemot

RABBI BERNARD FOX

"And the woman conceived and she gave birth. And she saw that the child was good and she hid him for three months." (Shemot 2:2)

Parents often sense that their children come preprogrammed. Children seem to be predisposed to

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MOSES' 3 SIGNS

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

Exodus, 4:1-9: 1) "And Moses answered and said, 'They (the Jews) will not believe in me and they will not listen to my voice, for they will say, 'God did not appear to you.' 2) And God said to him, 'What is in your hand?' and he said, 'A staff.' 3) And He said, Throw it to the ground', and he threw it to the ground, and it became a serpent. And Moses fled from before it. 4) And God said to Moses, 'Send forth your hand and grasp it by its tail'. And he sent forth his hand and he seized it, and it was a staff in his palm. 5) 'In order that they believe you, that God appeared to you, the God of their fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.' 6) And God said to him, 'Further, bring now your hand into your chest', and he brought his hand into his chest, and he took it out, and behold his hand was leprous as snow. 7) And He said, 'Return your hand to your chest', and he returned his hand to his chest, and he took it out, and behold, it returned to its flesh. 8) 'And it will be if they do not believe you, and they do not listen to the voice of the first sign, then they will listen to the voice of the second sign. 9) And it will be if they do not listen to also these two signs, and they do not listen to your voice, and you will take from the waters of the Nile, and you will spill it onto the dry land, and it will be that the water that you take from the Nile, and it will be blood on the dry land.'"

God instructs Moses on his mission to free the Jews. God then responds to Moses' doubt of the Jews' conviction in his divine appointment, by giving him three signs. These signs will prove God's appearance to him. A number of questions arise. Before reading further, take time to review the verses above, and discuss them with others. Simply reading on will remove your opportunity to engage in

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**Reacting to
Tsunami**
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the process of learning and the use of your own thought. This process is how we become better Torah students, thereby refining our own thinking for future study. It is also an enjoyable activity. The Torah was purposefully written in a cryptic style so as to engage the mind in this most prized activity of analysis, induction, deduction and thought - our true purpose whose rewards are unmatched, both here, and in the next world. Once you have spent due time reviewing the issues, feel free to read the questions enumerated below, and our possible answers.

Questions: 1. The sign of blood is said to be the ultimate proof of God's directive. How does this sign surpass the others? 2. If blood is more convincing than a staff turning into a serpent, or leprosy, why not instruct Moses to perform the blood sign first? Three signs would then not be necessary! 3. What are the ideas conveyed through each specific sign? Why were these three selected? 4. Why does God give Moses signs easily "duplicated" by the magicians? 5. What is meant by the "voice" of each sign? 6. In both cases, the transformation of a staff into a serpent, and Nile water into blood, does not take place until both objects reach the ground, as it says, "and he threw it to the ground, and it became a serpent", and "it will be blood on the dry land." What is the reason for this "miracle at a distance"? 7. Why do the first two signs "return" to their original objects? What need does this serve? 8. Why is Moses requested to "conceal" his hand in order for it to become leprous? God could certainly make him leprous without him concealing it. 9. In contrast to the sign of blood where God tells Moses what will happen to the Nile's waters before the sign's performance, why does God not tell Moses what will happen to the staff or his hand before those miracles? 10. What will the Jews learn when they hear Moses referring to God as "the God of their fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob"?

We must say the following: The reason for three signs is twofold; 1) God wished the viewer to be convinced of His appointment of Moses with minimal, emotional amazement; and 2) God wished this from everyone, as additional signs of less deniability accompany the first. God knows what the most convincing sign is, i.e., blood, but He desired it come last in the sequence. A Rabbi Mann teaches in this weeks JewishTimes issue, God desires we use our minds.

Action at a Distance

It is for this very reason that additional features are found in these signs. I refer here to the fact that both the staff, and the Nile's waters transformed only once on the ground. It is not the ground that is essential here, but the "distance" between Moses' hand and the transformation. All magicians require tactile control of their manipulated objects. Without physical contact, they cannot create illusions through sleight of hand. However, Moses' objects did not transform,

while in his hand, but only once distanced from his control. "Distance" teaches that this was not sleight of hand - his hand was nowhere near the transformation! These signs could only be explained as true miracles, as God's actions.

Magic Does Not Exist

Sforno on Exod. 4:3 cites Talmud Sanhedrin 67b: (Responding to the plague of lice, and their inability to mimic it) "Then the magicians said to Pharaoh, 'this is the finger of God.' This proves that a magician cannot produce a creature less than a barley corn in size. [Strengthening this first position] Rav Pappa said, 'By God, he cannot produce something even as large as a camel! [So what does it mean that a magician cannot produce a creature less than a barley corn?] [It means] these that are larger than a barley corn, he can collect, and produce the illusion that he has magically created them.'" This Talmudic portion teaches that the human hand cannot control that which is too small.

Sleight of hand was known in the times of the Talmud, and in Egypt's times. All magic is illusory. What these Egyptians performed by hand was quicker than the eye, but only when the object was large enough to manipulate. Our Rabbis did not accept that any powers exist outside natural laws. God is the only One capable of altering natural law - only He created it, only He controls it. Saadia Gaon too stated that the Egyptian's blood trick was performed by the use of colored dyes, and the frogs leaped out of the Nile by their use of chemicals that frogs repel. Sforno also states that the Egyptian's snakes had no movement, i.e., they were not real. Moses' staff transformed into a "nachash", not the lifeless "tanin" of the Egyptians. The difference in terms indicates to Sforno, a difference in the two performances.

Blood

Blood is the source of life. When one sees water transformed into blood, one realizes that life itself is in God's hands. This strikes at the core of any person's greatest fear - death. Additionally, its creation from the Nile disputed the Nile's position of grandeur. But as God wishes we come to know Him by the use of our higher nature - our intellect - He did not order the blood sign first in sequence. God offers a person the chance to rise to a higher level by following his mind. With a minimalist performance, man has the opportunity to exercise his thinking, and derive truths concerning God's will (His appointment of Moses) and His very existence.

Creation: Arrived at Through Reason

I digress to focus your attention on a related and essential idea: God's position as the Creator is the most import concept of human comprehension. Maimonides' Guide for the Perplexed, Book II, end of Chap XXV: "...Owing to the absence of all proof, we reject the theory of the Eternity of the Universe: and it is for this very reason that the noblest minds

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spent, and will spend their days in research. For if the Creation had been demonstrated by proof, even if only according to the Platonic hypothesis, all arguments of the philosophers against us would be of no avail. If, on the other hand, Aristotle had a proof for his theory, the whole teaching of Scripture would be rejected, and we should be forced to other opinions. I have thus shown that all depends on this question. Note it."

Maimonides teaches, "all depends on this question". What does he mean? I believe him to mean that by design, God wished that our conviction of this most central idea - God as Creator - must be arrived at through thought, and understanding, not through amazement at marvelous feats. In other words, our recognition of God as the Creator 'must' be apprehended through our reasoning. This is the highest form of recognition of God, and the preferred method to knowing Him, and His works. "All depends on this question," means that proof of Creation was purposefully left to the realm of the "philosophical", and not to "emotional" via astonishing, miraculous displays. It is easy to witness a miracle, and be convinced, but in such a case, our mind forfeits the exercise of reasoning - THE mark of man's perfection. It is fitting that man use his crowned capacity in the pursuit of this question, of God as the Creator. I now return to our topic.

The Serpent and Leprosy

Before resorting to blood, why did the staff transform into a serpent? On the surface, both the staff and a serpent have similar appearances, they are narrow, elongated shapes. Once transformed into a serpent, the viewer might second-guess what he saw, "Was it in fact a staff before hand, or was it a serpent in some stiffened state?" Control of one's emotions and clear thinking are required so as not to dismiss a miracle. Moses was given these signs for the very reason that the Jews were bent on disbelief in God's appointment of Moses. Hence, subsequent to a sign, the Jews might seek to explain away the miracle. To say the very minimum about this specific sign, we may suggest that it teaches that God controls life. He can turn a lifeless staff into a living organism. God's control of life would appear to offer the most impact on the Jews. Therefore God's signs were indications of His control of life. But this was yet animal life. More impressive, was Moses' hand becoming leprous. Here, God sought to teach that He controls human life. He does so in the negative (becoming leprous) as well as the positive (healing of Moses' leprosy). The fact that Moses own hand was smitten, may serve to teach again that it was not Moses who created such a feat, as one would not risk self injury. Similarly, one would not create a dangerous serpent.

Another observation of the serpent and leprosy is that the transformation into a serpent displays God's control over the "matter" of creation, while leprosy displays His control of His "laws" of creation. Transforming a staff into a serpent displays God's

control over matter itself. Disease has a natural process. Moses' leprous hand displays that God controls "how" things behave. These two, initial signs bear witness to God control of both aspects of Creation - of matter, and laws governing that matter.

Perhaps, in order to minimize the affect of "astonishment", God instructed Moses to first conceal his hand before it became leprous. For if a hand became leprous in plain sight, it would overwhelm the viewer, prohibiting his mind from fully functioning. This feat would startle him. Therefore, God told Moses to hide his hand. God also gave Moses signs easily "duplicated" by the Egyptians. And as Rabbi Mann taught, this was for our reason that the viewer use intelligence to discern true miracles of God, from man's sleight of hand. We may also suggest that the "voice" of each sign refers to the underlying "concept" derived by the mind, as opposed to the feat per se. God wished the viewer to understand each sign's message - its "voice".

Why did the first two signs return to their original forms? This may also be a practical issue, that Moses may once again perform these signs.

Why does God not tell Moses what will happen to the staff or his hand before those miracles? Mindful that God enabled these signs as a "response" to Moses' concern that he be validated, perhaps God did not inform Moses of the sign until it happened for good reason: God wished that Moses sense the effects of a these signs, just as would the Jews. By experiencing the sign without advance warning, Moses could identify with the perception and emotional impact afforded the Jews through these signs. Thereby, Moses' "first hand" knowledge gave him the security in these signs. God answered his concern in a primary fashion. He now knew how the Jews would react to these signs - that they were impressive. Had God told Moses what was about to happen, his expectation would lessen the emotional impact of these signs.

The Fulfillment of God's Promise

Our final question was, "What will the Jews learn when they hear Moses referring to God as "the God of their fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob"? I believe this may serve to illustrate God's consistent kindness. As Moses was God's emissary for the Redemption, the Jews would be more inclined to accept this news and Moses' role, by recalling how God favored their ancestors, and not just on one occasion, but the lifetimes of many individuals. The Redemption was not a deviation, disbelieved by the Jews, but it was consistent with the manner in which God relates to His people - to His prophets' descendants. We learn from this that God saw it necessary even prior to the act of redemption, the Jews required a psychological conviction in God's forthcoming salvation. This state of mind was necessary, and God reassured the Jews of His unchanging kindness through this statement. ■

(Shemot continued from page 1)

Weekly Parsha



certain behaviors and attitudes. Is this perception accurate? Are we capable of molding our children? To what extent can we influence their development? This week's parasha provides some insight into this issue.

One of the topics discussed in this week's parasha is Moshe's early development. Moshe was born during a period of severe persecution. Paroh had decreed that all male babies born to Bnai Yisrael should be drowned. Our pasuk tells us that Moshe's parents saw that their child was good and decided to take desperate steps to save his life. Our Sages ask two questions on this passage. First, the passage tells us that Moshe's parents saw that he was good. The Torah does not waste words on the obvious. Virtually, every parent thinks his or her baby is beautiful. Even if others think the infant has been a little shortchanged in natural beauty, this is rarely the perception of the baby's parents. So, what is the point that the Torah is making in telling us the Moshe's parent believed him to be beautiful?

Second, the Torah implies that because Moshe's parents were so moved by his goodness they decided to hide him. Does this mean that other parents who were not so moved willingly offered their children to the Egyptians for execution? Certainly, this is not the case! There is no doubt that all parents did their best to try to save their newborns from the Egyptians!

Nachmanides raises and answers both of these questions. He explains that the Chumash does not intend to tell us that Moshe's parents were impressed with his beauty in the same manner as other parents. In the case of other parents, this impression is based on the internal feelings of the parents. Their love for their offspring generates their conviction in the beauty of the child. As we have pointed out, because the source of the judgment is internal, it may have no objective basis in the external reality of the child's actual appearance. In contrast, Moshe's parents – Amram and Yocheved – based their evaluation of Moshe's goodness on objective evidence. The Torah tells us that they saw he was good. The Torah is telling us that they saw objective evidence. The Chumash is not interested in revealing the exact nature of this evidence. Our Sages suggest various possibilities. For example, in Tractate Sotah, the Sages suggest the Miryam – Moshe sister – received a prophecy that Moshe would save Bnai Yisrael.

Nachmanides further explains that although all parents must have tried to save their newborns from the Egyptians, Amram and Yocheved resorted to desperate measures. For example, they attempted to hide Moshe in the river. They were moved to resort to these schemes because they knew that Moshe was special. Therefore, they had reason to hope that Hashem would intervene and cause these measures to succeed.[1]

Nachmanides' insight not only explains our passage but it also answers other questions on our parasha.

“And the child matured and she brought him to the daughter of Paroh and she was a son to her. And she named him Moshe – for from the water I pulled him.” (Shemot 2:10)

The daughter of Paroh rescues the child from the river. She adopts the child as a son. She names him Moshe. This name is derived from the phrase, “I drew him from the water.” This name – Moshe – is name by which the child will be known throughout the Torah. Did not Moshe's parents provide him with a name? Why is Moshe known by the name that he received from the daughter of Paroh and not by the name he received from his true parents?

Our Sages tell us that Moshe's parents did give him a name. It was either Tov or Tuvya.[2] Both names are derived from the word tov – good – and refer to Moshe's parents' initial impressions of their child.

Now that we know Moshe's original name, we can understand its replacement. The initial name refers to the Amram's and Yocheved's recognition that their child was special and different. This recognition was the basis for their unusual plan to save him. Paroh's daughter renamed the child Moshe. Apparently, she chose this name because her experience of saving the child from the river created a maternal bond. Because of this bond, she adopted the child and he was raised as a prince in the home of Paroh. So, Amram's and Yocheved's desperate plan succeeded wonderfully. Not only was Moshe saved, he was rescued from bondage and raised as royalty. This confirmed Amram's and Yocheved's conclusion that the boy was special and that Hashem's providence would work on his behalf. To Paroh's daughter the name Moshe represented her bond to the child. But to the reader of the incident the name alludes to the act of providence that forged a bond between a condemned infant and a princess. The name Moshe is a specific expression of the providence represented by the name Tov. So, the Torah did not replace the infant's original name with a completely new name. Instead, it expanded on the theme of original name with a new name that communicated the same idea of providence over the child but with far more detail.

In short, the Torah is telling us that it was part of this providential plan that Moshe grow and mature in the house of Paroh. Why was this important?

“And it was in those days and Moshe matured. And he went out to his brethren and he saw them in their burdens. And he saw an Egyptian man strike a Hebrew from among his brothers.” (Shemot 2:11)

Moshe matures and he investigates the condition

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Weekly Parsha

of his brothers – the Hebrews. He observes an Egyptian man persecuting a Hebrew. Our Sages note that the passage opens by telling us that Moshe had matured. The previous passage opened with the same phrase. Each phrase refers to a different period in his life. Yet, each describes Moshe as mature at that moment. At which point did Moshe actually become mature?

Nachmanides explains that maturity occurs in stages. In the prior passage the Torah is telling us that Moshe had reached an adequate level of maturity to be brought to live with the daughter of Paroh. In our passage, Moshe has further matured. He is now interested in his brothers and their travails.[3]

This is a simple and obvious explanation of the passage. However, Rashi offers an alternative explanation. Rashi comments that the first passage refers to physical development. When Moshe was physically mature, he was brought to the daughter of Paroh. However, he was not yet prepared to assume responsibility as a member of the royal household. Our passage tells us that Moshe has matured emotionally and was now ready for responsibility. He had been appointed to supervise Paroh's household.[4]

Rashi's explanation is not unreasonable. However, it seems much more speculative than the simpler explanation offered by Nachmanides. Why does Rashi prefer his explanation over the more obvious interpretation?

“And he looked in each direction and saw that there was no one there. And he struck the Egyptian and he hid him in the sand.” (Shemot 2:12)

Moshe decides he must save his brother from the Egyptian. He will have to kill the Egyptian. But Moshe does not act impulsively or rashly. First, he carefully inspects whether he is being observed. Once he is certain that he is alone, he kills the Egyptian and hides his body.

The Torah describes in detail Moshe's precautions to avoid detection. Nonetheless, in the next passages Moshe discovers that he was observed. And these observers are eager to inform against him. Moshe realizes that he must flee Egypt.

What is the message in this juxtaposition? What does the Torah tell us by juxtaposing a description of Moshe's precautions with his discovery?

Perhaps, the Torah is pointing out that Moshe was not discovered because he was impulsive or careless. On the contrary, Moshe took every possible precaution. Nonetheless, he was discovered. The implication is that providence was again at work. Providence decreed that Moshe was raised in Paroh's home. Providence now decreed that he leave that home. Why was it now time to leave?

Let us return to an earlier question. Why was it

important for Moshe to be raised in Paroh's house? Gershonides explains that this upbringing helped prepare Moshe for his future mission. Egypt was the most advanced culture of its time. The Egyptians had the most advanced knowledge of science. In Paroh's home Moshe would learn from the most accomplished of Egypt's scholars. He would be exposed to the most advanced thinking of the age. This would help prepare him intellectually for his role as leader of Bnai Yisrael. However, he would also prepare emotionally. In Paroh's home he developed as a free person and as a member of the royal family. Paroh was familiar to him. This relationship would be invaluable. Paroh would not be able to overawe Moshe. Moshe would be able to stand up to Paroh.[5]

However, Moshe's development in this environment also posed a danger. Moshe could forget his origins. He was in danger of becoming an Egyptian. The bond between Moshe and his adopted family had to be severed at the appropriate moment – after Moshe had gleaned from the environment the maximum benefit but before he assimilated. According to Rashi, Moshe appointment over the royal household was this moment. Once Moshe assumed a position of authority, his identity was endangered. At that moment, providence again intervened to break the bonds between Moshe and the royal family.

In other words, Rashi is suggesting that Moshe must have matured in some way that precipitated Hashem's intervention and Moshe flight. He suggests that the maturity that Moshe reached was in his position as a member of the household. Rashi contends that once we interpret Moshe's maturity in this way, we can appreciate the connection between Moshe's maturity and the crisis that immediately follows and culminates in Moshe's flight.

The Torah position on the importance of environment upon children is very clear. The Torah maintains that these influences are crucial and help shape the personality of the child. The Torah's account of Moshe's early life describes Hashem interfering with natural events in order to carefully shape this environment and then reshape it. ■

[1] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Nachman (Ramban / Nachmanides), Commentary on Sefer Beresheit 2:2.

[2] Mesechet Sotah 12a.

[3] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Nachman (Ramban / Nachmanides), Commentary on Sefer Beresheit 2:11.

[4] Rabbaynu Shlomo ben Yitzchak (Rashi), Commentary on Sefer Shemot 2:11.

[5] Rabbaynu Levi ben Gershon (Ralbag / Gershonides), Commentary on Sefer Shemot, (Mosad HaRav Kook, 1994), pp. 6-7.

Why the Jews Deserved Bondage

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM



Why were the Jews subjected to Egyptian bondage? To recap, Moses once saved the life of a Jew beaten by an Egyptian. Moses carefully investigated the scene, he saw no one present, and killed the Egyptian taskmaster and buried him in the sand. The next day, Moses sought to settle an argument between the infamous, rebellious duo Dathan and Aviram. They responded to Moses, "will you kill us as you killed the Egyptian?" Moses feared the matter was known. But how was this matter made public? The Torah described the scene just before Moses killed the taskmaster (Exod. 2:12), "And he turned this way and that way, and there was no man (present)..." So if there was clearly no one present, who informed on Moses? A Rabbi once taught there is only one possible answer; the Jew who Moses saved was there, he turned in Moses. We are astounded that one who's life was saved would inform on his savior. What causes such unappreciative behavior? The Torah's literal words describing Moses' astonishment are "(Moses said) therefore the matter is known", referring to the disclosure of Moses' murder of the Egyptian. Rashi quotes a medrash on the words "the matter was known", paraphrasing Moses' own thoughts, (Rashi on Exod. 2:14) "The matter has been made known to me on which I used to ponder; What is the sin of the Jews from all the seventy nations that they should be subjugated to back-breaking labor? But now I see they are fit for this." Moses now understood why the Jews were deserving of Egyptian bondage. This ungrateful Jew's backstabbing act answered Moses' question. But this ungrateful nature is not its own trait, but a result of another trait: the act of informing on Moses displays an inability to undermine Egyptian authority; "Even if my brother Jew saves me, Egypt is still the authority who I must respect". It wasn't aggression against Moses, but an unconditional allegiance to Egypt. Even prior to Egyptian enslavement, the Jews' were emotionally crippled, and we predisposed to the phenomenon

of identification with their oppressor. The famous Patty Hearst case teaches us of the Stockholm Syndrome, where victims sympathize with their captors. Israel too sympathized with Egypt. Such an identification would cause one to inform on his own friend, even on his own savior Moses. Moses witnessed this corrupt character trait firsthand and realized that Israel justly received the Egyptian bondage as a response. But how does the punishment fit the crime? (You may ask that this is reverse reasoning, as this ungrateful nature came subsequent to bondage, not before. But I answer that Moses too knew this, yet Moses saw something in this ungrateful act which he knew predated Egyptian bondage, answering Moses' question why Israel deserved this punishment.) So what was Moses' understanding of the justice behind Israel's bondage? Seeing that the Jew informed on him even after saving his life, Moses said, "the matter is known", meaning, I understand why the Jews deserve bondage.

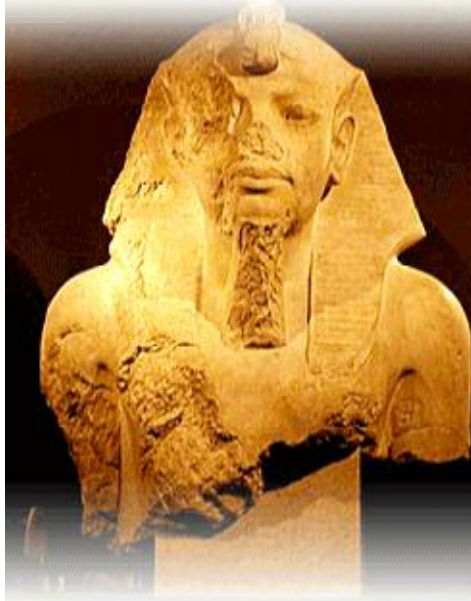
The informant was a valid example of the Jewish nation as a whole. He displayed how far the Jews were corrupted into recognizing man, over G-d. He represented to Moses, the sin of the entire people; somehow, in the Jew's mind, man was raised to inappropriate heights, overshadowing G-d's true position. man was so valued, that he would turn on his own brother, his own savior. What was the remedy? The Jews were presented by G-d (through slavery) the opportunity of realizing this sin. Slavery is the one institution where man desires not to be under the grips of man. We read, (Exod. 2:23) "...and their cries ascended to G-d because of the slavery. And G-d heard their cries..." The Egyptian bondage successfully caused the Jews to redirect their hearts towards G-d to remove their affliction. G-d's plan worked, and immediately commenced His plan to save them. Realizing the informant's sin, Moses now had his answer for why the slavery was a just response from G-d. The punishment fit the crime.

We look at Israel today and realize that the Jew saved by Moses has begot many offspring. How many Jews are sympathetic to other nations, to even those oppressing us through murder? How many Jews in Israel's government seek to "talk" to those who butcher infants? How many secular Jews corrupt G-d's justice by treating an enemy like a prospect for peace? King David acted properly. He did not go to the table to talk with his enemies. He rightfully warred against those who might slay his people. If our misguided leaders continue their deadly dance, Israel's people will continue to be murdered.

Moses taught us that the one who beats a Jew deserves death. How much more so those who plan the bus executions of civilians and children, with the most horrifying and painful methods? ■

Pharaoh's Astrologers

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM



In Exodus 1:22, Rashi states that the day Moses was born, Pharaoh's astrologers told him that the Jewish messiah had been born, but they weren't sure as to whether this messiah was born of the Jews or of the Egyptians.

Later in Exod. 2:3, Rashi states that the reason why Moses' mother Yocheved could not hide him anymore, was because the Egyptians counted the months from when Yocheved and her husband remarried, to determine when a new baby would be born, in order to slay him. Since Moses was born three months premature, his mother was able to hide him that length of time. But at the ninth month, she knew that the Egyptians would be visiting to kill Moses.

A number of questions surface:

1) Did or did not the Egyptians know when Moses was born? From the first Rashi, they seemed to know based on astrology, but from the second Rashi, we learn they miscalculated by three months, as they did not include Moses' premature birth in their calculations. If they felt Moses' true birthday was the day the messiah was born, they should have searched Yocheved's home three months earlier than they actually did, on Moses' actual day of birth. Additionally, they should have ceased killing males from that day forward, satisfied in their knowledge that they killed the messiah on that day. The fact that they continued to kill males even after their calculated day of the messiah's birth demonstrated their own doubt in their prediction.

2) How can humans know something outside of their sense perception? Is astrology fact or fiction?

3) Why were these astrologers only "certain" about one aspect (that he was born) but they were ignorant of his nationality?

On the one hand, one could side with the Egyptians and state that when they predicted Moses' birth, it was indeed his birthday. But since he was born three months premature, they didn't bother searching his mother's tent, as they assumed whoever was born, was born at nine months. This still shows ignorance. On the other hand it seems more correct to state that the Egyptians really didn't know anything, and when they stated that the messiah was born, it was a guess, perhaps to maintain their position. Previously, they suggested that Pharaoh's dreams of the 7 cows represented 7 daughters who would be born and then die. They were wrong here, and in many other cases. But it wasn't objectively proven that their theory was impossible, so they remained at their posts.

A Rabbi suggested that this might not have been the first time the Egyptian astrologers predicted the birth of a messiah. The astrologers, as in the past, had to produce information to make them

credulous, and to keep their positions. If they never inform Pharaoh of news, Pharaoh might dismiss, or even kill them. Thus, they were always under pressure to provide information to Pharaoh. They also had to be sure that any information couldn't be proved 100% wrong, so when they would state matters, they would do so either in generalities, or in areas that one can never prove impossible. Alternatively, the astrologers saw that Pharaoh was now subjugating the Jews, as the Jews were more numerous, and possibly could pose a threat to the Egyptians. The astrologers surmised the possibility of an uprising, and weren't sure whether it would be spearheaded by a Jew or an Egyptian sympathizer. They therefore used rational deduction in their forecast to Pharaoh and told him that it could be either a Jew or Egyptian savior.

The fact that the astrologers could not determine Moses' nationality, and that the second Rashi implies miscalculation, uncovers their ignorance, and removes any credibility of their astrology.

Perhaps this is why Rashi recorded these two stories, to teach that their astrology is a farce. Just as people today cannot read palms, or foretell events, so too was the case in Egypt. Pharaoh had his astrologers as a source of security for areas where he was in doubt. All that was needed was that Pharaoh believed them. Objective reality was not a concern of Pharaoh. Emotional security was.

The Radak, as well as the Rabbis, dismiss any truth to the Baales Ov (the female conjurer) in Samuel I, 28:7-19. They deny any reality to this story, and call it all "futility, void, lies, and mockery".

King Saul had visited the Baales Ov to bring up Samuel from the dead. The story on the surface says she did, and that King Saul talked with Samuel. The Radak however quotes the Rabbis and states, "the Rabbis said three things in regards to conjurers, 1) the one who brings up the dead sees but doesn't hear the dead person, 2) the one who is in need hears, but sees not the dead, and 3) the ones who do not care either way, neither see nor hear anything. Such was the case with King Saul, he was in need, so he heard Samuel talking, the Baales Ov saw, but didn't hear, and the two who Saul traveled with, Avner and Amasa, neither saw nor heard a thing."

What does this prove? That King Saul's discussion with Samuel was a daydream, a fantasy, or an illusion. Just as sometimes we think we hear someone talking to us or calling our name, all but to turn and see nobody there, so too according to Radak and the Rabbis was this case with King Saul and the Baales Ov. Saul was in such emotional need and distress, that he thought he heard Samuel. His two men didn't care, so they heard nothing. And the Baales Ov needed to keep her status, so she feigned seeing him.

(continued on next page)

Weekly Parsha

As Jews, a rational people, we do not believe knowledge emanates from sorcerers. They are all false. Knowledge emanates from God, and there are specific ways of uncovering this knowledge - careful analysis, and rational thinking. Just as the study of physics and all other sciences which are based on principles embedded in the tangible universe require methodology to arrive at concepts, so much more so, the abstract world of ideas disclosed to us through the Torah requires a refined, trained, and rational approach.

It is relatively easy to detect when something is an accurate science. If it follows rational principles, it can be a science. If however, we hear statements such as, "this crease in your palm is long, therefore you will live long", or "wear this red string and you will ward off the evil eye", we should see no connection between an accidental fold in our flesh or strings, and the avoidance of disastrous situations, which will lead to our death. These types of statements should be immediately identified as outside the rational sphere.

Taking what we hear on the surface as truth, and believing it, is not the way to learn. Even when reading a Rashi, we should look into it, and see if it is as clear as rational ideas should be. If not, perhaps he is teaching us something beyond the surface.

A reader responded to this article as follows:

Reader: You seem to say that Pharaoh's astrologers were incorrect, in essence guessing, and that Saul did not really hear Samuel. If so, first of all, why were these episodes recorded in Tanach?

Mesora: See the Radak on the incident concerning Saul and the Baales Ov, the female conjurer. The Radak states that Samuel did not rise from the ground as a cursory reading would suggest. Radak states that it was all a projection on Saul's part - a fantasy of his mind. The Torah is designed to teach man about the law, which is aimed to benefit man's soul, his mind, and his drives. As such, the reason the Torah records such stories is to teach us how man operates psychologically, whether it be when man operates positively, or even negatively, as with Saul, and Pharaoh's astrologers. Seeing how Saul and Pharaoh's astrologers made mistakes, teaches the reader about incorrect notions, so we learn more about our nature as humans, and that we may also identify that from which we should distance ourselves.

Reader: Also, if the astrologers were guessing, why would Pharaoh be willing to kill the thousands of Egyptian boys who would have been born that day?

Mesora: The astrologers were in positions of counsel due to Pharaoh's need for advice. They counseled Pharaoh with general statements, such as those where they could not be proved wrong, i.e., "you will have 7 daughters, and you will bury 7 daughters". If Pharaoh approached them and said, "where are my 7 daughters?", they could respond. "You will have them yet". Similarly, they stated, "A savior of the Jews is to be born". Pharaoh was superstitious, and out of a fear of an uprising of a savior, he, like any other leader insecure of his reign, might resort to following the only prospect for success, that being the astrologers' advice of slaying even Egyptian males.

Reader: And if they were guessing, how did they get the date right?

Mesora: Who said this was the only day they told Pharaoh that a savior could be born? Perhaps they said this on many occasions, and chance had it that they also said it on Moses' birthday. Keep in mind that the astrologers previously stated that a savior is to be born. The first time they said this, they were unsure about his date of birth, and they were unsure about his origin, whether it was Egyptian or Hebrew. They were feigning knowledge of future events, as Pharaoh was looking to them for direction. They couldn't say "we don't know". They would either lose their positions, or be killed. They therefore made general statements that had possibility of coming true, based on current events.

Reader: Similarly, how did Saul hear from his dream of Samuel correct information about his and his son's death in the coming war? And why would he have imagined hearing his teacher telling him he would die?

Mesora: Saul stated that he was grieved by the Philistines' oppression, and that God had removed Himself from him. This shows that Saul was in a worried state. When one is in such a mindset, his dreams may follow his fears. This also applies to daydreams, which the Rabbis state Saul was experiencing. Why he actually was killed with his son, may have been due to his mindset. One not at ease, and with tremendous worry, will falter in his decisions, and Saul's decisions here were in war. His death, and his son's death were not foretold, rather, they were either results of his fears distorting his clear thinking, or God's punishment. Many times, what one fears is brought out in a nightmare as a method of dealing with the fear. This means that to move past the fear, one may construct a nightmare where he faces that fear, for the longer-term goal of not having that fear anymore. But in no way are people's fantasies actual perceptions of the future, unless they are prophetic, in which case, they are not fantasies. ■

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

Punishment

DOUG TAYLOR & RABBI MORTON MOSKOWITZ

"If you don't stop that, I'll paddle you so hard you won't be able to sit down for a week!"

The kids didn't obey, but their mother's angry voice certainly got the attention of everyone on our ferry's forward upper deck. Seated several rows over, I turned back to my friend, the King of Rational Thought, while an afternoon deluge pounded out a reminder of western Washington's rainy reputation.

"Hmm," I said, half to myself. "Reminds me of dealing with my own kids."

"Really?" he replied with a disarming smiling. "Do you handle your children that way?"

I glanced at the mother, still struggling to corral her herd of wild ponies, and replied, "Well, I try not to get angry. But sometimes it seems like threats are the only way to get compliance."

Now it was his turn to say, "Hmm." I suddenly felt uncomfortable.

"Why is it so important for you to get compliance?" he asked.

"Well, to make them behave, of course. To teach them the right way to do things."

"Do you think that threatening them teaches them the right way to do things?" he asked gently.

That didn't seem fair. Or maybe I just didn't like looking in a mirror. I didn't answer.

He took a different tack.

"What's the purpose of punishment?" he asked.

I hesitated, then finally said, "Well, it's to punish people when they do bad things. When someone does something bad, you can't just let them get away with it." I found myself exasperated. Why was he questioning such an obvious concept? "Besides," I said defiantly, "sometimes people, and children, deserve it."

"I see," he said. "Tell me, do you think seeking revenge is a positive character quality?"

"No."

"What's the emotional difference between seeking revenge and saying that someone deserves to be punished?"

Checkmate.

"You see," he said, graciously not pushing the point, "there are really only two rational reasons to punish someone. The first reason is correction. This is as true for teaching a child not to run out in the street as it is for teaching an adult not to steal. We need to teach the child or adult to modify his or her behavior. But to achieve true, long-lasting correction, the punishment must be designed to bring about a real behavior change, not just compliance out of fear. If compliance comes only

from fear, then compliance ceases as soon as the threat is removed. How many times have you told your children to do something under threat of punishment, only to have them do it when you're not around?"

"In crafting punishments," he continued, "emotions cloud the picture. The common parental approach of 'if you don't stop that, I'll spank you' is often more an expression of the parent's anger than a well-thought-out punishment designed to achieve real behavior change. That's why many of our societal responses to discipline problems and crime are ineffective. They're based more on vengeance motivation than on a carefully considered correction process."

I pondered that idea for a minute, then asked, "What's the second reason for punishment?"

"To protect society," he said. "Even if

correction is impossible, society must protect itself from certain types of people, such as serial killers. However, even in these cases, the punishment should be designed solely with the objective of protecting society, not exacting vengeance."

I was quiet for a long time, thinking about how I sometimes discipline my children. The thoughts did not cheer me. What would happen, I wondered, if I disciplined my children only for their benefit and not mine? What if I disciplined my children based on my intellect rather than my emotions? What if I carefully designed punishments solely to achieve real understanding and behavior change on their part, instead of the short-term quick-fix compliance that so easily masquerades as the real thing?

I decided to find out. ■



Letters

Absolute Truth?

Reader: Dear Mesora-

I enjoyed reading the article, "Questioning the Bible," by Doug Taylor and Rabbi Morton Moskowitz. I was, however, bothered by on statement towards the end of the essay:

"Based on the questions surrounding this passage, this interpretation is the only one that makes sense."

To say that there is only one correct interpretation of a Biblical verse, simply because you see certain questions in it, is an unfortunately simplistic way of approaching the infinite wisdom of Tanach. Our commentators have struggled with the words of the Torah, working hard to find the most likely reading of the text - the "pshat" - the original intent of the author. Ramban in his introduction to "Milchamos Hashem" (his defense of the Ri'f against the Baal HaMeor) says that when we deal with the study of Torah there is only "more likely" and "less likely", not "absolutely certain". Would the author of this article unconditionally reject the possibility that other commentators can explain this verse differently? I would hope not. They were all struggling to find the most likely reading of the text. The more correct way to phrase an opinion on a Biblical text is "Based on my reading of the text and my knowledge of the textual context, this is what I think the most likely reading is." I must assume that this statement was only the opinion of this particular author and not of Mesora as a whole.

Shabbat Shalom,
Oren

Mesora: I don't know that Rabbi Moskowitz meant what you understood. But if Rabbi Moskowitz felt this was the only view that appealed to his mind as the accurate explanation, he is justified in expressing his true thoughts. The objective of Torah is to arrive at "absolute truths". If one does not do so, his mind has not truly apprehended, and his values are not based on what he sees as absolute truth.

One might ask: "The Rabbis too argued vehemently on each other, 'convinced' that the other was wrong. Do you feel the Rabbis were justified in feeling that another Rabbi was 'absolutely' wrong? If so, where is the difference in assuming one has detected the 'absolute' truth?"

There is a clear difference between dispelling a

fallacy, and proving and absolute reason for the truth of a phenomenon. When dispelling fallacy, all that is required is one reason. Once a valid, incontrovertible objection exists, the proposed idea must be false. There may exist additional reasons for its fallacy as well. However, when claiming "the" reason for something's truth, one must exhaust all possibilities, as the person's claim is to an "exclusive" reason. Exclusive, by its very definition, means there is no other reason. Of course, the latter is far more difficult, but not impossible.

If Rabbi Moskowitz felt he exhausted all other possibilities, then he is justified in saying so. The Rabbis and Sages too opined singular reasons for many aspects of Torah.

Although man's knowledge cannot approximate the knowledge of God, and we will never know all, God did give us the capability of realizing truth. God desires we arrive at truth. This requires our "convictions". Revelation at Sinai for example was clearly created to function as a proof to all peoples and generations that God exists. Studying the phenomena unique to that event allows us to arrive at this conclusion. So too is the case when studying any area: upon detecting the phenomena unique to a given topic, we are thereby enabled to arrive at its true meaning and purpose. And if one is fortunate enough to arrive at such convictions, he would be at fault if he ignored what his mind told him was absolutely true.

Many times, our emotion of insecurity or fear of opposition stifles our creativity, thought, and convictions. Intellectual courage is required, if one is to make continued progress in his observations of creation and Torah, arriving at an ever-increasing love for God. One cannot love God, if he does not feel convinced of what he has learned. Love of God means that his love is based in reality. And reality refers to truths, which his mind sees as absolute. ▣

Incorporeality of God II

Reader: In reference to the Rabbi who said, "Part of God is in man", I think he meant to say, "Part of God's attributes" are in man. When we review the Chumash (Genesis 1:26) "Let us make man in our image" (Our image) as our likeness" the plural was used to show God's humility. Since God has no form, the referred to "Image" must be referring to God's 'attributes'. If we place a mirror in front of

man, and this man leads a Torah way of life, and is a servant to God, we see the reflective image of God.

God has unlimited attributes, some of which he gave to man, such as Wisdom; Who is good, and Who does good; Strength and power; and the ability to create, with intellect and hands. When we say the blessing; "Blessed are You, God our Lord, King of the universe, who formed man in His image", was God using wisdom, or gave man wisdom, or both? Either way, wisdom was God's attribute, and man's attribute. So a part of God's attribute is in man!

Rabbi Akiba said, "Man is of God! And what is far more, he knows he is of God."

What motivated me to write to you was twofold; first, it troubled me that two wonderful teachers were squabbling in public, and over a mere misunderstanding. Second, I saw the opportunity to achieve the mitzvah of bringing peace between two Jews. Please forward this petition to the Rabbi, and see if he concurs with my observation, "Part of God's attributes are in man", and by doing so, he will grant me the ability to gain the mitzvah.

Thank you, Chaim

Mesora: While I admire your intent to bring peace, in truth, I see no discord in Torah terms. The Rabbis write, "All disputes for the sake of heaven (to arrive at truth) will eventually be sustained. And those that are not for the sake of heaven will not. What is an argument for Heaven? The disputes of Hillel and Shammai." (Ethics, 5:17) This means that if one argues with another in Torah, as did Hillel and Shammai, it is praiseworthy. We do not sacrifice a zealous battle over Torah truths for a lesser objective of placating another person. A Rabbi once taught that there is a tradition that one does not play politics in Torah study, allowing niceties to obscure a fierce, Torah debate. If two Torah students or scholars argue, they must not restrain their vigor and biting fight for their positions, so as not to upset the other. They must not allow anything to mitigate their strengths. Torah study must be approached with anger, "Af chachmasi amda li", "But my knowledge sustained me." (Ecclesiastes, 2:9) So writes King Solomon. The Rabbis comment on the word "Af", which also means "anger": "Only with anger will one's studies be sustained". All of one's energies are required if he is to succeed at uncovering God's immense wisdom. We are not allowed to restrain ourselves in Torah disputes. This would damage the Torah

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Letters

learned, and eventually spread to others. We must not allow the goal of peace, to surpass the objective of Torah truths.

Now, as to your points: we must know that man's soul is created. As such, it has nothing in common with God, whose existence is not created, but Who exists, by His very nature. Therefore, God's unfathomable nature, as he told Moses, Who possesses "essential existence", has absolutely no parallel with man who is a created being: "To what will you compare Me that I should be similar?" This is Isaiah speaking God's words, clearly stating that absolutely nothing equates to God. We cannot know Him, so how can we make any equations?

What then does the Torah mean by "In the image (tzelem) of God He created man"? Maimonides writes (Guide to the Perplexed, Book I, Chap. I):

"The term tzelem, on the other hand, signifies the specific form, viz., that which constitutes the essence of a thing, whereby the thing is what it is; the reality of a thing in so far as it is that particular being. In man the 'form' is that constituent which gives him human perception; and on account of this intellectual perception the term tzelem is employed in the sentences 'In the tzelem of God he created him' (Gen. 1:27). It is therefore rightly said, 'Thou despisest their tzelem' (PS. lxiii. 20): the 'contempt' can only concern the soul the specific form of man, not the properties and shape of his body. I am also of opinion that the reason why this term is used for 'idols' may be found in the circumstance that they are worshipped on account of some idea represented by them, not on account of their figure and shape. For the same reason the term is used in the expression, 'the forms (tzalme) of your emerods' (I Sam. vi. 5), for the chief object was the removal of the injury caused by the emerods, not a change of their shape. As, however, it must be admitted that the term tzelem is employed in these two cases, viz. 'the images of the emerods' and 'the idols' on account of the external shape, the term tzelem is either a homonym or a hybrid term, and would denote both the specific form and the outward shape, and similar properties relating to the dimensions and the shape of material bodies; and in the phrase 'Let us make man in our tzelem' (Gen. 1:26), the term

signifies 'the specific form' of man, viz., his intellectual perception, and does not refer to his 'figure' or 'shape.' Thus we have shown the difference between tzelem and toar, and explained the meaning of tzelem."

Maimonides states that man is termed a "tzelem Elokim", "God's image", as man possesses intelligence, and not that in anyway does man share a component with God. Again, God created man's soul, and God is not created. Therefore, man's soul and God are not equivalent in any manner. A Rabbi once commented that God allowed His name "Elokim" ("Tzelem Elokim") to be associated with man's soul, so as to indicate the high level of this apparatus, and that through it, we may attain knowledge. God wished to indicate the high level of importance with which man must treat his soul. But this term "Image of God", or "Tzelem Elokim" refers to nothing other than man's created intelligence.

Ibn Ezra writes (Gen. 1:26) "And forbid, forbid, that there should be form to God. And so it says, 'to what shall you equate me that I shall be similar?' And on account of man's higher soul that is does not die, he is equated in his life to God." Ibn Ezra explains that on account of man's eternal life of his soul, he is equated somewhat to God. But he adds that it is only a concession that the Torah speaks this way, as man can only understand ideas, in his own terms. In truth, there is no equation between God and man, or any creation.

What is meant by "Let 'us' make man"? (Gen. 1:26) Ibn Ezra writes that this teaches that God spoke to the angels, and created man through the angels, and not through anything already created in the physical realm, on Earth. How God did this is a mystery.

In conclusion, suggesting man is somewhat of a "reflection" of God, or that man possesses God's "attributes", must be denied. The Torah and the Rabbis use terms addressing both God and man, which are similar only in structure, but not in meaning. As sensual beings, all ideas we learn are tied to the physical, and are therefore greatly limited when understanding God's nature. Certainly, if God says that nothing equates to Him, this too includes man's soul, and we must be silent when tempted to project our subjective, false views. Instead, we must study the Rabbis' words so that we are guided away from fallacy unsupported by Torah, towards whatever truths we might attain. We must also not be reticent in our learning, but conversely, debate in Torah with unbridled strength. ■



Two Menorahs?

Reader: Could you please inform me as to the Menorah: I have seen 7-candle Menorahs and 9-candle Menorahs. Please tell me the meaning of each.

Mesora: The Levites and priests used the 7-branch Menorah in the Temple alone. I believe this existed to demonstrate the idea that our God is the Creator who rested on the 7th day. It is of the utmost importance that we are regularly cognizant of God's identity as the Creator. The Menorah, in the primary location of God's worship, assists the Levites and priests in this manner.

The 9-branch Menorah is used only on Channukah: there are 8 days, and one extra light is required so one is not using the prohibited light of the Menorah, which are the other 8 lights. The lights of the Channukah Menorah have one purpose: to publicize the miracles. Therefore, personal use is prohibited. In order that we do not use their light, the Rabbis instituted there be another light in the room through which, one may perform his activities at night. ■

Why We Bless God II

Reader: We have been getting e-mails from Mesora for some time now, but I had not taken the opportunity to explore the inside of Jewish Times until Dec. 17. This first glimpse made me seriously question the value of continuing as a subscriber. As an illustration for the article on blessings, in which you discuss the need to bless when perceiving beauty, you appropriately included a lovely nature scene. I cannot understand, however, your need to include a picture of a beautiful woman as well, a most inappropriate choice, inconsistent with the principles of "tzniut" (modesty). Please explain this apparently poor editorial decision.

Sincerely, Esther

Mesora: Kindly explain what halachic violation of Tzniut you refer to by our placing this photo. We see no violation of any halacha or philosophy of Tzniut. Thank you.

Reader: Causing men to gaze upon a woman for the purpose of appreciating her beauty is a breach of tzniut.

Mesora: If you might cite the halachik source, we would appreciate it, and will post your quote(s).

Reader: The prohibition against gazing for the purpose of enjoyment at even parts of a woman's body that are typically exposed is discussed in Brachot 24a, Shabbat 64b, Rambam Issurei Biah 21:2, Shulchan Aruch Even Haezer 21:1, and Igrot Moshe Orach Chaim 40, among other sources.

Mesora: Thank you for providing your sources. However, in all the sources you quoted, it is not stated that viewing a 'photo' violates this halacha (law). This institution addresses the need to "distance" one's self from prohibited sexual intercourse. As such, a live, potential partner - not a photo - is that from which what one must distance himself. I do not claim to know all halachos. But based on what I have read on this area, it appears that looking at a photo is not in violation. ■

Response to a Refutation of Kuzari's Proof of Sinai

You make four errors: 1) you are remiss in your citation of the events transmitted by the Sinaic Jews, 2) you also err in your equation between a mass (Jews) convinced of witnessed "events", and Thebans who accept "beliefs", 3) you assume that alterations in succeeding transmission might explain our current Sinai account, and 4) you prefer emotion over intellect. (Shabbos/Halachik experiences)

Hitler too succeeded at causing Germans to 'believe' they were a superior race. Christians 'believe' in Jesus' purported miracles. People can "believe" things, even en masse, and even over generations. But such belief acts as no proof, of which the human mind is quite capable of obtaining.

No historical account witnessed by masses was successfully transmitted, unless it truly occurred. This is Kuzari's argument, and the proof of God and Judaism's Divine origin. This is the proof used to validate all historical events. This is why we accept Caesar as having existed; even if no artifacts had been found. Judaism's proof of Sinaic history and miracles functions no different than history's myriads of other events.

A people will not transmit Moses' words "Lest your eyes forget" (Deut. 4:9), had they not witnessed the event. Had they not witnessed Sinai, surely there would be in our hands today, the "true" story of those Jews. A fabrication would not completely obscure what actually did take place. Masses do not share a common motive to lie. Lying is based on motive, and masses remove any possibility of a "common" motive.

This phenomenon found in Deuteronomy, where masses attest to Divine Revelation, will never be found in any other religious of cultural doctrine. No group will transmit to others that they truly witnessed that which they did not. But when we do find such accounts, this is an incontrovertible argument of its validity. This is

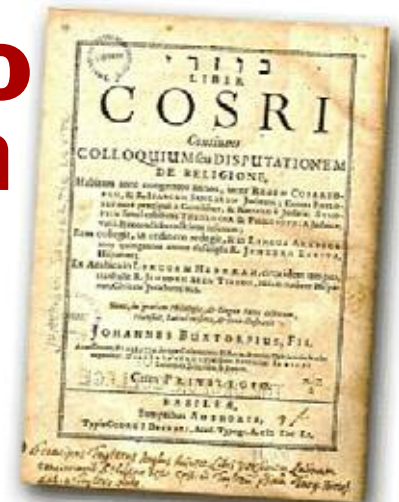
certainly so when such an account as Sinai is identical the world over. Add to this, the absence of any other historical account of that people at that era. The story would not have been transmitted if the Jews were not convinced of what they saw. This is the Kuzari's proof – not belief.

Regarding alterations in Sinai's true account, why is it that there is but one account today? Where are all those alterations you allude to? Did they just conveniently disappear? Surely, as you assume, we should possess variations of that account...but there are none.

Further, Judaism is based on proof, not feel good, experiences of Shabbos, or the like. Emotions must be separated from intelligent proof. The two are as oil and water. Emotions have not the capacity to "prove" anything. The fact that proof exists as a real human ability must be preferred when deciding our most fundamental and primary of concerns (such as truth, matters of God, our souls) over simple acceptance, regardless of the "spiritual" pleasure. For this reason, we are commanded not to follow the False Prophet deviating from Torah, even if he produces miracles. Why should we not follow his miracles over God's? It is due to the incomparable level of provable evidence available through Sinai. Proof surpasses visual tricks. Moses was justified in teaching the Jews not to follow a False Prophet, as Moses too recognized that something of proof outweighs all other considerations. According to you, an emotional or mind qualia surpassing Judaism would justify following the False Prophet, and Moses is wrong.

Man was gifted his metaphysical soul and intelligence so as to engage them, not decry them. Had God desired that we neglect the ability for proving matters, he would not have orchestrated Sinai, nor given us a soul capable of proof.

Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim ■



Tsunami

T Reacting to Tsunami

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

The recent tsunami has already claimed the lives of over 116,000 people from Indonesia, Sri Lanka, India, Thailand, Myanmar, Malaysia, Maldives, Tanzania, Bangladesh, Somalia, Kenya, and Seychelles. When disasters of such magnitude strike, many wonder if this was an act of God, or was it nature. And if it was nature, how could God allow so many to perish. Many wonder how so many innocent lives could be forfeited, and question the justice of the Creator. As is the case in all matters, if we wish to arrive at an accurate understanding of the reality of the world in which we live, and how the Creator relates to mankind, we must consult God's own words, His Torah, and the words of the Rabbis. We must not rely on knee-jerk emotions, and ignorance.

God's revelation at Sinai was the only time in history at which God revealed Himself to masses, making this event the exclusive validation of the only words spoken by God, and transmitted in writing to the mankind. The Rabbis of the Talmud possessed the oral transmissions received by Moses, passed on throughout the generations. What do the Torah and the Rabbis say about such events?



God is Not the Creator of Evil

King David

"The Lord is good to all, and His tender mercies are over all His works" (Psalms, cxlv. 9).

Guide for the Perplexed, Book III, Chap. X

"It cannot be said of God, that He directly creates evil, or He has the direct intention to produce evil: this is impossible. His works are all perfectly good. He only produces existence, and all existence is good: whilst evils are of a negative character, and cannot be acted upon. Evil can only be attributed to Him in the way we have mentioned. He creates evil only in so far as He produces the corporeal element such as it actually is: it is always connected with negatives, and is on that account the source of all destruction and

all evil. Those beings that do not possess this corporeal element are not subject to destruction or evil: consequently the true work of God is all good, since it is existence. The book, which enlightened the darkness of the world, says therefore, "And God saw everything that He had made, and, behold, it was very good" (Gen. 1:31). Even the existence of this corporeal element, low as it in reality is, because it is the source of death and all evils, is likewise good for the permanence of the Universe and the continuation of the order of things, so that one thing departs and the other succeeds. Rabbi Meir therefore explains the words, "and behold it was very good" (tob me'od): that even death was good in accordance with what we have observed in this chapter. Remember what I said in this chapter, consider it, and you will understand all that the prophets and our Sages remarked about the perfect goodness of all the direct works of God. In Bereshit Rabba (Chap.1) the same idea is expressed thus: "No evil comes down from above."

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Nature**Guide for the Perplexed, Book III, Chap. XII**

"The first kind of evil is that which is caused to man by the circumstance that he is subject to genesis and destruction, or that he possesses a body. It is on account of the body that some persons happen to have great deformities or paralysis of some of the organs. This evil may be part of the natural constitution of these persons, or may have developed subsequently in consequence of changes in the elements, e.g., through bad air, or thunderstorms or landslips. We have already shown that, in accordance with the divine wisdom, genesis can only take place through destruction, and without the destruction of the individual members of the species the species themselves would not exist permanently. Thus the true kindness, and beneficence, and goodness of God is clear. He who thinks that he can have flesh and bones without being subject to any external influence, or any of the accidents of matter, unconsciously wishes to reconcile two opposites, viz., to be at the same time subject and not subject to change. If man were never subject to change there could be no generation: there would be one single being, but no individuals forming a species. Galen, in the third section of his book, The Use of the Limbs, says correctly that it would be in vain to expect to see living beings formed of the blood of menstruous women and the semen virile, who will not die, will never feel pain, or will move perpetually, or will shine like the sun. This dictum of Galen is part of the following more general proposition: Whatever is formed of any matter receives the most perfect form possible in that species of matter: in each individual case the defects are in accordance with the defects of that individual matter. The best and most perfect being that can be formed of the blood and the semen is the species of man, for as far as man's nature is known, he is living, reasonable, and mortal. It is therefore impossible that man should be free from this species of evil. You will, nevertheless, find that the evils of the above kind which befall man are very few and rare: for you find countries that have not been flooded or burned for thousands of years: there are thousands of men in perfect health, deformed individuals are a strange and exceptional occurrence, or say few in number if you object to the term exceptional -- they are not one-hundredth, not even one-thousandth part of those that are perfectly normal."

Maimonides describes the inherent frailties of physical creation. Even calamities are at times the work of creation, and are necessary for the sustenance of the world as a whole. This is God's plan. He knew calamity would strike at times, but nonetheless, created the world and mankind. However, these calamities are few and far in number. Examining generations, and not single events, we find that the world operates in a manner which sustains life, not destroying it. Due to the need for rain, and Earth's topography so that this very rain may travel to distant reaches, at times, mudslides may engulf homes. People will die in large numbers. But these are few cases when we look at the history of mankind. However, God also works with Divine Providence: He can spare those such as Noah and his family if God sees them as deserving, or if mankind's only hope rests with



them. Additionally, God's considerations are far beyond man's grasp. We can never know all that contributes to His decisions, and we can never know when an event was His providential decision.

Punishment of Mankind

I will list but a few Talmudic statements that may increase our knowledge – if we study them in depth – of God's methods and reasons for punishing mankind. These may be singular reasons, or God may punish based on the presence of many of these.

Talmud Sabbath 139a

"All the punishments that come to the world do not come except because of the (evil) judges of the Jews." (Based on Micha, 3:1)

Talmud Yevamaos 63a

"Punishment does not come to the world except because of Israel." Rashi comments, "To fear the Jews, in order to return them to repentance."

Talmud Succah 29a

"There is no nation that is punished, without their gods being smitten with them." This teaches that the crime of other nations, who are smitten, is their religious fallacies.

Talmud Baba Kama 60a

"Punishment does not come to the world except in a time when there are wicked people in the world."

Talmud Baba Basra 8a

"Punishment comes to the world because of the unlearned Jews."

Talmud Sanhedrin 102a

"Not a single punishment comes to the world which does not contain some small measure of the sin of the Golden Calf." This indicates that punishment arrives due to idolatry. The Jews' sin of the Golden Calf was an expression of their need to relate to God in some physical, idolatrous manner. This was generated from their weak psychological needs, which apparently is rooted in all mankind.

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Death of the Righteous

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"We, however, believe that all these human affairs are managed with justice; far be it from God to do wrong, to punish any one unless the punishment is necessary and merited. It is distinctly stated in the Law, that all is done in accordance with justice; and the words of our Sages generally express the same idea. They clearly say: "There is no death without sin, no sufferings without transgression." (B. T. Shabbath, 55a.) Again, "The deserts of man are meted out to him in the same measure which he himself employs." (Mish. Sotah, i. 7.)"

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"The numerous evils to which individual persons are exposed are due to the defects existing in the persons themselves. We complain and seek relief from our own faults: we suffer from the evils which we, by our own free will, inflict on ourselves and ascribe them to God, who is far from being connected with them! Compare, "Is destruction His [work]? No. Ye [who call yourselves] wrongly His sons, you who are a perverse and crooked generation." (Deut. xxxii. 5) This is explained by Solomon, who says, "The foolishness of man perverteth his way, and his heart fretteth against the Lord." (Prov. xix. 3)

Talmud Baba Kama, 60a

"Once God gives permission to the destroyer, it does not distinguish between righteous (people) and the wicked. And furthermore, destruction commences with the righteous, as it says, "And I will cut off from you the righteous and the wicked" [Ezekiel, 21:9]. [The righteous are mentioned first]. Abaye said, this is a good to them, as it states, [Isaiah 57:1] "The righteous expires, and there is no man. Place [this] on [your] heart. And men of kindness are gathered [to death] and none understand: for due to evil is the righteous gathered." God states He will kill the righteous, just prior to when God's justice demands that He deliver punishment to the world. The righteous are killed to spare them the anguish of witnessing humankind's disaster, not because they sinned. (Rashi, Radak) Rashi states that it is futile to think that the righteous should precede the wicked and be punished first.

Talmud Avodah Zara, 4a

"And I will cut off from you the righteous and the wicked." [Ezekiel, 21:9]. This means that since these righteous ones had the ability to rebuke the sinners, but did not, they are not considered to be 'wholly' righteous." Tosfos adds that this is applicable only when the sinners would have listened. But if the righteous people know that the sinners will not receive their rebuke, then the righteous are not at fault for remaining silent.

“Our response must be one of humility; seeking what God has written, not what man projects.”



God's Providence

Maimonides writes that God's providence extends to every member of mankind in proportion to his perfection. God created His world for man's sole purpose of studying His works and following His ways: His works are creation, and His ways are openly described in His Bible, His Torah. Those who approach God earn God's protection, while those distant from Him do not.

Guide for the Perplexed, Book III, Chap. LI

"Providence watches over every rational being according to the amount of intellect which that being possesses."

Guide for the Perplexed, Book III, Chap. XVIII

"For the action of Divine Providence is proportional to the endowment of intellect, as has been mentioned above. The relation of Divine Providence is therefore not the same to all men; the greater the human perfection a person has attained, the greater the benefit he derives from Divine Providence. This benefit is very great in the case of prophets, and varies according to the degree of their prophetic faculty: as it varies in the case of pious and good men according to their piety and uprightness. For it is the intensity of the Divine intellectual influence that has inspired the prophets, guided the good in their actions, and perfected the wisdom of the pious. In the same proportion as ignorant and disobedient persons are deficient in that Divine influence, their condition is inferior, and their rank equal to that of irrational beings: and they are "like unto the beasts" (Psalms, xlix. 21). For this reason it was not only considered a light thing to slay them, but it was even directly commanded for the benefit of mankind. This belief that God provides for every individual human being in accordance with his merits is one of the fundamental principles on which the Law is founded.

Consider how the action of Divine Providence is described in reference to every incident in the lives of the patriarchs, to their occupations, and even to their passions, and how God promised to direct His attention to them. Thus God said to Abraham, "I am thy shield" (Gen. xv. 1): to Isaac, "I will be with thee, and I will bless thee" (ibid. xxvi. 3); to Jacob, "I am with thee, and will keep thee" (ibid. xxviii. 15): to [Moses] the chief of the Prophets, "Certainly I will be with thee, and this shall be a token unto thee" (Exod. iii. 12): to Joshua, "As I was with Moses, so I shall be with thee." (Josh. i. 5) It is clear that in all these cases the action of Providence has been proportional to man's perfection. The following verse describes how Providence protects good and pious men, and abandons fools; "He will keep the feet of his saints, and the wicked shall be silent in darkness: for by strength shall no man prevail." (I Sam. ii. 9)

When we see that some men escape plagues and mishaps, whilst others perish by them, we must not attribute this to a difference in the properties of their bodies, or in their physical constitution, "for by strength shall no man prevail", but it must be attributed to their different degrees of perfection, some approaching God, whilst others moving away from Him. Those who approach Him are best protected, and "He will keep the feet of his saints"; but those who keep far away from Him are left exposed to what may befall them; there is nothing that could protect them from what might happen; they are like those who walk in darkness, and are certain to stumble. The protection of the pious by Providence is also expressed in the following passages: "He keepeth all his bones," etc.

(PS. xxxiv. 2 1): "The eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous" (ibid. ver. 16): "He shall call upon me and I shall answer him." (ibid. xci. 15). There are in Scripture many more passages expressing the principle that men enjoy Divine protection in proportion to their perfection and piety. The philosophers have likewise discussed this subject. Abu-nasr, in the Introduction to his Commentary on Aristotle's *Nikomachean Ethics*, says as follows: Those who possess the faculty of raising their souls from virtue to virtue obtain, according to Plato, Divine protection to a higher degree.

Now consider how by this method of reasoning we have arrived at the truth taught by the Prophets, that every person has his individual share of Divine Providence in proportion to his perfection. For philosophical research leads to this conclusion, if we assume, as has been mentioned above, that Divine Providence is in each case proportional to the person's intellectual development. It is wrong to say that Divine Providence extends only to the species, and not to individual beings, as some of the philosophers teach. For only individual beings have real existence, and individual beings are endowed with Divine Intellect; Divine Providence acts, therefore, upon these individual beings.

Study this chapter as it ought to be studied; you will find in it all the fundamental principles of the Law; you will see that these are in conformity with philosophical speculation, and all difficulties will be removed; you will have a clear idea of Divine Providence."

Summary

God is not the creator of evil, as God's creations are positive entities, while all evil is the detracting of some positive. Additionally, the Torah teaches that all God's ways are just. We derive proof of this from so many cases in the Torah; from God's salvation of Noah and his family, from Daniel's three friends, Chananya, Mishael and Azarya, who God miraculously saved from the furnace, from God's redemption of the Jews from Egypt through miracles, and from God's kindness in granting man a Torah system to perfectly guide us to truth and happiness. All is within God's control. As He stepped in and saved many righteous people in the past as our Torah teaches, He always functions in this manner. "I am God, I do not change". (Malachi, 3:6) He can and will protect those who come close to him. But coming close to God, by definition, requires that an individual studies God's words, and apply them in life.

God works with many methods, such as Divine providence: He kills the righteous to spare them pain; He saves the righteous when calamity befalls others; He afflicts the righteous and the world to help us achieve greater perfection; and He is far from those who do not know Him. God also works with the laws of nature: insuring the continued existence of the Earth and mankind. Natural laws at times will claim lives, and in the devastation of this tsunami, tens of thousands. We cannot say whether this event was God's providence, or if natural laws set in place during creation resulted today in this event. We cannot say who in specific is worthy of God's providence, and who is not, without facts. Only God knows this. What we can do is study as far as possible, what God has taught mankind through His Torah and His prophets. In place of going with our own feelings based on nothing other than our subjective, false 'sense' of justice, we must mature our thinking, studying the works and words of the Creator. We must feel fortunate to have them in our possession.

We will never obtain all the answers - only God knows all. However, through diligent study of His words, we can arrive at an ever-increasing knowledge of what God desires of mankind, and how God operates in His world. With this knowledge and perfection in our lives, we do not only benefit from the greatest life, one filled with an appreciation for God's wisdom, but we will also enjoy God's providence.

As we see from so many quotes, there is a great amount to learn before we may arrive at any conclusions. God's knowledge is responsible for the universe, the knowledge of which scientists realize they are yet merely scratching at the surface. How much more so are sciences like this, like God's justice, which is intangible, and greatly abstract?

As the Rabbis of the Talmud teach, we must examine our ways and repent from our wrongdoings, cleaving to God's knowledge, and assisting others through acts of kindness, with teaching as the greatest kindness one can perform. But to teach, one must learn.

Job suffered due to his lack of knowledge. It was only after he realized his errors, that God removed all his pain and tragedies, and improved his situation. What are our errors? Are we those who do not give charity, or not the prescribed amount of 20%? Do we commiserate with the poor? Are we unethical in business? Are we involved in illicit, sexual relations? Do we speak poorly of others? Are we unlearned, and refrain from engaging in Torah study? Do we abstain from helping others because of inconvenience? Do we not pray every day? Are we leaders who do not instruct our people accurately and constantly?

This tragedy should point us towards God's Torah, His only system for all of mankind, and the Rabbis' words. Only through study, will we arrive at what is truth: what God commands, "for our own good" as Moses taught. For these reasons, God created mankind. And once we know these reasons, we must teach others. We must not let our subjective desires override the actions and thoughts God wishes for us.

The Torah is for both Jew and gentile. There is a set of commands obligatory upon each of us. The time to follow them is long overdue. ■

