



**Traveling through history, from Egypt to the Middle East, we discover religions bearing the same flaws. Man does not change, so he repeats his errors. We examine the flaws of religions in this weeks issue.**

*Khepri (left) was one of the class of Egyptian gods associated with a particular animal. Khepri was the sacred scarab. The scarab is a type of dung beetle common to Egypt. The word Kheper means "scarab" in Egyptian and Khepri was also known as Khepera.*

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**RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM**

Having discussed Christianity at length this year, I thought it beneficial that we understand the flaws of the other major religions. Many people – even Jews – harbor respect for other religions, as it is difficult to simply disregard the actions of billions of people and negate all truth concerning other religions, that which is so dominant in the world's eyes. Many times, coreligionist, "frum Jews", state that they feel "all religions have some good". Of course this statement violates God's words. But they have unfortunately succumbed to the pitfalls of our exile. They have allowed popular opinion, and sympathy to override what they know is true based in Torah.

As you read my research and critique, be mindful that God gave a system to mankind only once. He said the event of Sinai would not reoccur. Be mindful that there is only one "man", and thus, only one best way of life: one religion. Be mindful: all religions except Judaism are manmade. Now, as you read, understand the flaws in manmade religions. Confirm in your mind how they are incomparable to a religion designed by the One who created the universe...and mankind.

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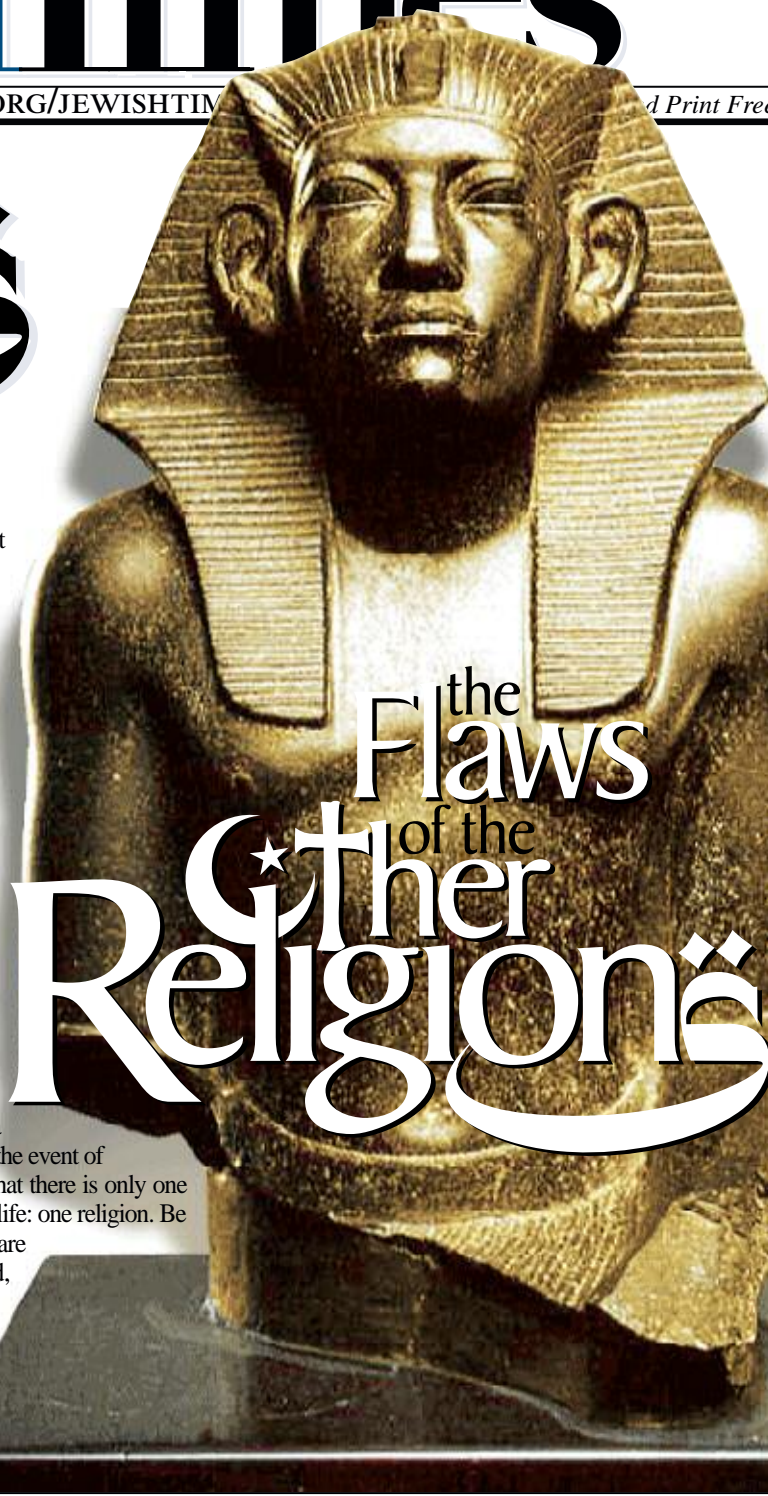
**Weekly Parsha**

**Bo**

**RABBI BERNARD FOX**

"And all of these servants of yours will come down to me and they will bow to me and say, 'Leave – you and all of the nation at your feet.' And afterwards I will leave. And he left from Paroh in anger." (Shemot 11:8)

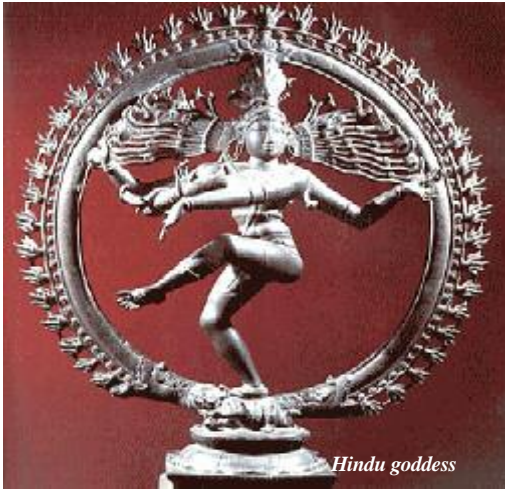
I work with teenagers. Many – maybe even most – have some



**the  
Flaws  
of the  
Other  
Religions**

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## Other Religions



Hindu goddess

## Hinduism

(Name derived from a body of water)

The word Hindu is derived from the name of "River Indus". Hinduism is generally associated with a multiplicity of gods, and it does not advocate the worship of one particular deity. The gods and goddesses of Hinduism amount to thousands, all representing the many aspects of only one supreme absolute called "Brahman". Each deity is really an aspect of the Brahman or, ultimately Brahman itself.

Hinduism's error is exactly that of the Egyptians. Both cultures, incapable of relating to a single God, distorted reality to their desires (instead of the converse) and imagined sub-deities, each of whom was said to control a limited realm, i.e., sun/moon gods, river gods, fertility gods, etc. But such a position should have alerted the adherents that if one deity cannot control another domain, this limitation should demote its status as a god. However, when the emotions are at work, reason does not have a fighting chance. Additionally, the religious emotions are most powerful. Not only do they satisfy instinctual drives, but they also give great meaning one's sense of being, his higher purpose in life: his religion. When both

natures in man are catered to, it is most difficult to abandon such complete satisfaction.

Hinduism defined: "Fantasy is reality". Hinduism is the unbridled, religious fabrication of and attachment to, many gods so as to satisfy man's many emotional needs and insecurities.

## Buddhism

(Name derived from a man)

On a full moon day of May, in the year 623 B.C., there was born in the districts of Nepal an Indian Sakya prince named Siddhattha Gotama, subsequently named Buddha. Buddha means, "enlightened one" or "awakened one". Buddha began his meditation as a Hindu. He was awakened with a new "enlightenment" only to denounce Hinduism and emerge as the founder of a new religion. Like other religions, it has its own special teachings and practices. But, unlike other religions, Buddhism does not believe in God. Consequently, it is sometimes referred to as an atheistic religion, or a refined Hinduism. Buddhists assume God is a human fantasy created from human fear. Although

they claim allegiance to reason, they also believe that upon one's death, he or she reenters a fertilized human egg, to be reborn once again. Their cycle of rebirth is known as "samsara". This process repeats many times until one achieves a perfected state they refer to as "nirvana." At this point, no

more reincarnation occurs, and one exists eternally. Nibbana (nirvana) is the ultimate goal of Buddhism, the third "noble truth" in their system. In nibbana, the suffering and the desire that causes suffering have come to an end, as has the cycle of birth and death. They believe all this, but with no proof.

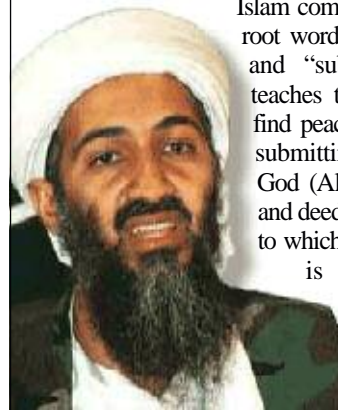
Their system is in contradiction: on the one hand they resort to arguments to justify abandoning God, but when it comes to what they cherish, arguments are not applied: they believe axiomatically the dead are replanted into a woman's egg. (Interesting is the need to place the moon as a focus, as he was born on the "full moon day.")

Buddhism is then nothing more than masses that adopted a single person's fantasies about a fabricated "nirvana", and the amazing stories of reincarnation that help one travel the distance. It promotes the idea that we must desire a state where suffering ends. Thus, Buddhism seeks a removal of a negative, not the attachment to any positive truths. It also does not offer insight into determining what is "negative" or "positive". I would suggest that Buddhism's mass appeal lies in its promise of this nirvana, a promise so appealing that those emotionally wrecked readily accept it without question. It would not be surprising to find those who convert to Buddhism as weak minded, insecure, neglected, or subjected to pain. Such a religion offers promises of a "light at the end of a tunnel", but never delivers.

Buddhism defined: "Unconditional, eternal pleasure". As no God exists in this religion, reward and punishment play no role - similar to Christianity's "guilt-free" credo. There are no penalties for life's errors or sins, so reincarnation will culminate in absolute pleasure. (However, as no God exists, they are hard pressed to explain why they hold of any morality. Who is to say what's moral?)

## Islam

(Name derived from submission to the Moon-god "Ala")



Islam comes from an Arabic root word meaning "peace" and "submission." Islam teaches that one can only find peace in one's life by submitting to Almighty God (Allah) in heart, soul and deed. The will of God, to which man is to submit,

is made known through the Qur'an (the K o r a n ) , revealed to his messenger

Muhammad. Muhammad, it is claimed, was the last of the great prophets, which included Adam, Noah, Moses, Jesus and some others. The basic belief of Islam is expressed in the shahadah, the Muslim confession of faith, "There is no god but God; Muhammad is the prophet of God."

Religions are born in one of three manners: 1) an individual or group conjures up a new system such as Buddhism's "nirvana"; 2) an individual or group rolls many old notions into a 'new' system; or 3) an individual or group combines new and old ideas. This latter formulation is witnessed in Islam. Islam

Meditating Buddha

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## Other Religions

bases itself on a false prophet with no evidence of his prophecy, and also attempts to gain "religious" status and equality with other accepted religions like Judaism, by claiming responsibility for it: "He has sent down the Book to you with truth, confirming what was there before it. And He sent down the Torah and the Gospel." (3:3) Again the Koran says: "We sent down the Torah containing guidance and light, and the Prophets who had submitted themselves gave judgment by it for the Jews - as did their scholars and their rabbis - by what they had been allowed to preserve of Allah's Book to which they were witnesses. Do not be afraid of people, be afraid of Me. And do not sell My Signs for a paltry price. Those who do not judge by what Allah has sent down, such people are disbelievers." (5:44)

Islam's psychotic arrogance claims responsibility for giving Moses to the Jews. They also claim they gave Jesus to the Christians. Amazing. Even more amazing is the acceptance of such lies by millions.

**Islam: The Moon-God Religion**

I will quote from, "A Short Summary of Islamic Beliefs and Eschatology":

*"The pre-Islamic deities of Arabia which were most venerated, were astral deities, especially the triad of the moon god, the sun goddess, and the god associated with the planet Venus. The moon god was the chief and was protector of the cities. These deities were given various names, however the moon god was evidently originally the Babylonian moon god 'Sin'. To end division among his people in Mecca, Muhammad elevated the moon god 'Al Ilah' to the chief and only god. (It is not widely known in Islam that Allah was a sexual being, having fathered three daughters--this is documented in the E.B.).*

*Among the visitors and residents of Mecca in the time of the prophet, were Jews as well as Christians. Muhammad's thinking was further heavily influenced by these followers of Abraham, as well as by special revelations, which were (it is said) communicated to him by the angel Gabriel. The God of Abraham was not Ilah, however, but Yahweh. Abraham was called by Yahweh from Ur of the Chaldees (Babylon) and renounced the pagan gods of his family, which were the gods of Babylon. In fact Babylon was the seat of all false religion after the Flood of Noah, and from Babylon idolatry spread throughout the rest of the ancient world.*

**Plagiarizing Judaism**

Muhammad assigned to the moon god of Mecca some of the attributes of the god of Abraham, however the pagan and occultic roots of pre-Islamic religion were not discarded. Another outright plagiarism of

Judaism is Islam's "Hajj". This is their essential pilgrimage to Mecca, the location claimed to be where Mohammed received his prophecies from Allah. Part of the Islamic ritual of Hajj is to walk seven times back and forth between the hills of Safa and Marwa. This is a re-enactment of Hagar's search for water, before the spring of Zamzam was revealed to her by Allah.

The center attraction in Mecca is the structure called the Kaba, claimed to be structured by Abraham and Ishmael. The area around the Kaba is considered sacred, and inside the area the truce of God reigns. Man and animals are safe here, and shall not be

*Kaba: borrowing its revered status from fabricated storied based on Abraham. Mohammed cannibalized Judaism.*



forced away. In the Koran it is written: "the first house built for mankind, was in Mecca, to bless and guide all worlds." (3:90) It is noteworthy that Islam worships a Black Stone, located in this area. It appears that Islam's original idolatrous roots have not been

lost, as they worship created matter too. (Some say this Black Stone is a meteor.)

Muhammad was persecuted for his teachings in Mecca and fled to Medina in 622 AD, his teachings were soon accepted and the community-state of Islam emerged. From the date of Muhammad's flight, called the hijrah, Muslims begin their calendar, AH (Anno Hegirae) 287 is the same as AD (Anno Domini) 900. During the early period Islam acquired its characteristic ethos as a religion uniting itself in both the spiritual and temporal aspects of life and seeking to regulate not only the individual's relationship to God but human relationships in a social setting as well. Thus, there is not only an Islamic religious institution (private) but also an Islamic code/law governing society (public). This dual religious and social character of Islam, expressing itself as a religious community commissioned by God to bring its own value system to the world through jihad (holy war or holy struggle).

Muhammad died in 632 AD and through jihad, Islam

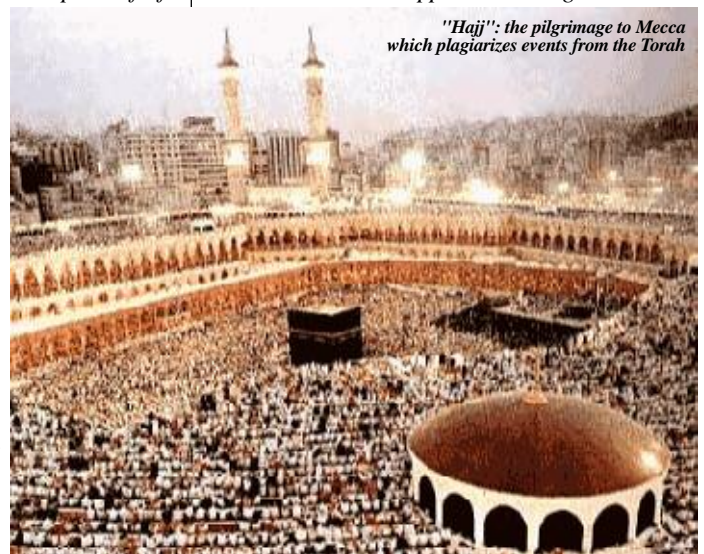
spread within a century from Spain to India. During the Muslim conquests Jews and Christians were assigned a special status as communities possessing Scriptures and are known to Muslims as "people of the Book" (ahl al-kitab) or dhimmis (protected people). Christians, Jews, and later Hindus and Zoroastrians were allowed religious autonomy, but had to pay a per capita tax called the jizyah. Many people converted to Islam to avoid the jizyah tax. In the 12th century the Muslim mystics, known as Sufis, were primarily responsible for spreading Islam to India, China, Central Asia, Turkey, and sub-Saharan Africa. Islamic traders were responsible (by the 14th century) for extending Islam to Indonesia, Malaya, and China."

(Collected by Lambert Dolphin)

It is clear that Islam is based on idolatry. Again we read, "Muhammad elevated the moon god 'Al Ilah' to the chief and only god". We also read, "Muhammad assigned to the moon god of Mecca some of the attributes of the god of Abraham." Islam is based on idolatry and plagiarism, and is primarily a "moon-god" religion in origin. Many cultures, which have a moon-god, have constructed this god to serve their needs of water. The moon is responsible for tidal changes.

Another resource says the following:

*"Allah was a pagan deity. In fact, he was the Moon-god who was married to the sun goddess and the stars were his daughters. Archeologists have uncovered temples to the Moon-god throughout the Middle East. From the mountains of Turkey to the banks of the Nile, the most widespread religion of the ancient world was the worship of the Moon-god. In the first literate civilization, the Sumerians have left us thousands of clay tablets in which they described their religious beliefs. As demonstrated by Sjöberg and Hall, the ancient Sumerians worshipped a Moon-god who was*



*"Hajj": the pilgrimage to Mecca which plagiarizes events from the Torah*

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## Other Religions



called many different names. The most popular names were Nanna, Suen and Asimbabbar. His symbol was the crescent moon. Given the amount of artifacts concerning the worship of this Moon-god, it is clear that this was the dominant religion in Sumeria. The cult of the Moon-god was the most popular religion throughout ancient Mesopotamia. The Assyrians, Babylonians, and the Akkadians took the word Suen and transformed it into the word Sin as their favorite name for the Moon-god."

We see that Islam is not the monotheistic religion it is believed to be. Its roots are idolatry, only later adopting Judaism's God, and Abrahamic history. Islam also contradicts itself, both supporting and denying the Torah. The following are quotes from their Koran:

*"I come confirming the Torah I find already there, and to make lawful for you some of what was previously forbidden to you. I have brought you a Sign from your Lord. So have fear of Allah and obey me."* (3:50)

*"Because of wrongdoing on the part of the Jews, We made forbidden for them some good things which had previously been lawful for them; and because of their obstructing many people from the Way of Allah, and because of their practicing usury when they were*

*forbidden to do it, and because of their consuming people's wealth by wrongful means, We have prepared for the disbelievers among them a painful punishment."* (4:160-161)

*"We sent down the Torah containing guidance and light, and the Prophets who had submitted themselves gave judgement by it for the Jews - as did their scholars and their rabbis - by what they had been allowed to preserve of Allah's Book to which they were witnesses. Do not be afraid of people, be afraid of Me. And do not sell My Signs for a paltry price. Those who do not judge by what Allah has sent down, such people are disbelievers."* (5:44)

*"We made forbidden for the Jews every animal with an undivided hoof, and in respect of cattle and sheep, We made their fat forbidden for them, except what is attached to their backs or guts or mixed up with bone. That is how We repaid them for their insolence. And We certainly speak the truth."* (6:146)

*"Say: 'You Jews, if you claim to be the friends of Allah to the exclusion of all other people, then wish for death if you are telling the truth.'" (62:6)*

*"Believe in what I have sent down, confirming what is with you (Torah). Do not be the first to reject it and do not sell My Signs for a paltry price. Have fear of Me alone."* (2:41)

Islam is bereft of its own identity. It was born of idolatry, from their "moon-god." Later, it sought wider acceptance, so it cannibalized Judaism and Christianity, going so far as to claim responsibility for these two religions. This response by Islam, to claim responsibility for Moses, is a method used by many plagiarists: they attempt to deny accusations of plagiarism by reversing the case, claiming that they in fact gave us Moses, and not that they stole our monotheism. When we encounter bogus claims in any area of life, many times there is precise rhyme and reason to such claims. In this case, Islam's claim of granting Moses to the Jews is quite transparent, as a cursory read of world history teaches how they cannibalized Judaism.

Islam, unable to win over adherents based on their lack of reason and corruption, resorted to "holy wars" to spread its venomous ideals. Although today one might equate it to Jewish monotheism, be careful. Understand their Koran, and the hate-filled positions of Islam. This is not monotheism based on the true God. This is monotheism based on hatred of all other members of mankind. Monotheistic religions carry the danger of practitioners becoming enamored with themselves as God's "chosen" ones. Such elevation of a culture's ego can allow these fundamentalists to justify anything imaginable in the name of "God". Their holy wars go on with no

remorse, precisely because they feel they are doing God's work...thus, the name "holy" war. With a holy war, a jihad, Muslims like Hindus find themselves emotionally and inextricably devoted to their beliefs, as their basic instincts are constantly satisfied: their religious emotion of being God's chosen is satisfied, as is their emotion of viciousness towards others in the form of "holy wars". We see they are quite aggressive, and this is no surprise, as their basic religious credo is "self love" which in turn fuels their hate of others. These brutal, Islamic fundamentalists can behead another human being without flinching. This is only possible of one feels his brutality is sanctioned by some higher purpose.

In stark contrast, Judaism's monotheism states that being "chosen" is not reflective of any higher level we have attained; rather, we were chosen for the purpose of educating others. Our focus is on God, and to teach the world, not to force it upon them, and not to parade arrogantly like so many Jews who imagine they are better. We stated so many times; God did not create "Jew" and "Gentile", but rather, "man and woman." This means that God intended the best life for ALL peoples. God gave His system to the Jew, only because Abraham secured that his descendants learn of God, thereby becoming the proper "keepers of the book."

As we study other religions, we learn more about human nature - the cause of these false religions. Man's insecurities propel him to create methods, which he feels will protect him. We then understand why many religions idolize the moon or sun, the major forces in the universe. Man's inability to relate to the true, abstract God, who is not seen, is quite difficult for the infantile personality. Trained from youth to stand in awe of his very tangible parents, the infantile personality remains crippled; as he does not learn new truths, which may help him extricate his emotions from the infantile, dependent state. Without knowledge, one will retain his "infant psyche", and will find comfort in the projections of others, titled today as "organized religion." He will find the religious expressions of others to condone his identical feelings.

As seekers of truth, we must not allow the great numbers of these religionists, their beautiful churches, or allow their recognition by mankind to affect our true evaluation of their corrupt natures.

Regardless of mankind's varying skin tones, hair types, languages, and personalities, there is but one type of "man." It follows rationally that there can be only one religion.

We see from Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam, three different approaches to fabricating a religion: Hinduism creates multiples god, Buddhism denies God, and Islam cannibalizes the God of others. ■



## Weekly Parsha

ambivalence towards authority. This ambivalence can turn to outright antagonism when the student feels that he or she has been wronged by a figure of authority. I do not think that these feelings just go away as teenagers develop into adults. Instead, adults develop greater control over expressing these feelings. Nonetheless, each of us probably knows at least one adult who struggles with controlling resentment towards authority. And this struggle is always the most volatile when an actual wrong has occurred. So, this raises an interesting question. How far should we go in opposing wrongs done to us? Is there a point at which we are overreacting and just expressing an innate antipathy towards authority? What is that point? In order to gain some insight into the Torah's perspective on these issues, let us consider Moshe's relationship to Paroh.

Now, this relationship is a perfect paradigm for analyzing our question. Moshe was commanded by Hashem to vigorously oppose Paroh. This opposition to Paroh was not over imagined wrongs. Paroh was evil and deserved to be destroyed. Yet, did Moshe set limits upon himself? Did he feel that there was some level of restraint that must be retained even when dealing with an evil despot like Paroh?

Let us begin our investigation by considering our passage. Moshe tells Paroh about the plague of the firstborn. He tells Paroh that all of the firstborn in Egypt will die – except the firstborn of Bnai Yisrael. Then, he tells Paroh that his servant will come to him – Moshe. They will prostrate themselves before him and beg him to leave Egypt with Bnai Yisrael.

In the end, the scenario that Moshe described did not unfold precisely as he predicted. Actually, Paroh himself sought out Moshe and begged him to lead Bnai Yisrael out of Egypt. This discrepancy between Moshe's prediction and actual events concerned our Sages and they offered an interesting explanation. According to Rebbi Yannai, Moshe knew that Paroh would himself seek him out. However in deference to Paroh's position as ruler, Moshe did not reveal to Paroh that he would humiliate himself.[1] Rebbi Yannai's position reflects a sentiment expressed by Rebbi Channina. Rebbi Channina taught that a person should regularly pray for the welfare of the government. He explained that if it were not for the presence of government authority, there would be no order or safety in society.[2] Rebbi Yannai maintains that Moshe's behavior reflected his conflict was with Paroh as an individual. But he respected Paroh as the head of his government. Moshe did not wish to show disrespect or undermine this position.

**“Go to Paroh in the morning. He will go out to the water and you should stand opposite him on the bank of the river. And the staff that was transformed into a serpent you should take in your hand.”** (Shemot 7:15)

The Sages were not unanimous in their support of Rebbi Yannai's position. Their dispute focuses on the above passage from Parshat VaEra. Hashem tells Moshe to demand that Paroh release Bnai Yisrael. If Paroh refuses, Hashem will turn the water in Egypt into blood. Hashem tells Moshe to confront Paroh in the morning as Paroh goes out to the water. Resh Lakish and Rebbi Yochanan dispute the tone of Moshe's message. Rebbi Yochanan shares the perspective of Rebbi Yannai. He comments that Moshe was required to address Paroh with respect. But Resh Lakish disagrees. He asserts that Moshe was required to demonstrate disrespect to Paroh.[3] This raises an obvious question. We understand Rebbi Yannai and Rebbi Yochanan's reasoning. They maintain that Moshe was required to keep the dispute focused. His dispute with Paroh could not turn into a rebellion against authority. Moshe must make clear that his conflict is with Paroh the individual but he is not an anarchist. Why does Resh Lakish disagree with this reasonable approach?

But before we can begin to understand the dispute between these Sages we must recognize and deal with another difficulty in Resh Lakish's position. There is no question that in our parasha – as explained above – Moshe omitted telling Paroh that he himself would be required to humiliate himself and beg Moshe to lead Bnai Yisrael out of Egypt. Rebbi Yaanai and Rebbi Yochanan can easily explain this act of deference. But according to Resh Lakish, Moshe was required to humiliate Paroh. How can Resh Lakish account for Moshe's apparent deference to Paroh?

**“And the servant of Paroh said to him, “Until when will this be a menace to us. Send the men and they will worship Hashem their G-d. Do you not yet know that Egypt is being destroyed?”** (Shemot 10:7)

Moshe tells Paroh that Egypt will be overrun by locusts. The locusts will consume any foodstuffs that survived the plague of hail. Paroh refuses to relent. But Paroh's servants oppose him. They strongly advise him to release Bnai Yisrael and they question the soundness of his judgment.

It is interesting that the Chumash includes this dialogue between Paroh and his ministers in the account. We have to wonder why this element is included in the narrative.

Perhaps, the answer is that this dialogue reveals that in the battle between Moshe and Paroh, Paroh's own ministers had begun to believe that Paroh could not prevail. Paroh was a mighty king. Paroh's ministers are characterized as his servants. Yet, these ministers accepted that Moshe was more powerful than Paroh.

If we this is the message of this incident, we have an incident into Resh Lakish's position. Paroh was a powerful ruler. His entire persona was dependant upon the manner in which he was viewed by his

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(Parshas Bo continued from page 5)

servants, ministers, and followers. Moshe told Paroh that his servant would seek him – Moshe – out and ask that he lead Bnai Yisrael from Egypt. According to Resh Lakish, Moshe was not sparing Paroh or showing him deference. He was adding to Paroh's humiliation. He was telling Paroh that his most trusted servants would abandon him. Forced to choose between their loyalty to their king and their fear of death, they would realize that Paroh could not protect them and they would abandon him. They would run to Moshe to seek salvation. Paroh would be revealed to be powerless and fragile.

In short, there are two possible reasons for Moshe telling Paroh that his servants – and not Paroh himself – would ultimately appeal to Moshe to lead the people from Egypt. According to Rebbi Yannai and Rebbi Yochanan, this was consistent with Moshe's policy focusing on his conflict with Paroh as an individual and avoiding turning this dispute into a campaign of anarchy. According to Resh Lakish, Moshe was heaping additional humiliation upon Paroh. He was telling Paroh that in the end his most faithful servants will abandon him.

This leaves us with one question. Why does Resh Lakish disagree with the reasonable approach and considerations of Rebbi Yanai and Rebbi Yochanan?

**“And a new king arose over Egypt that did not know Yosef.”** (Shemot 1:8)

This passage is one of the opening passages of Sefer Shemot. Rashi's comments on this passage are very well-known. Rashi quotes a dispute between Rav and Shmuel. According to Rav, the passage is to be understood literally. A new king arose that did not know Yosef. But Shmuel disagrees. He contends that no new king assumed power. However, the existing king adopted a new outlook and set of policies. He disavowed any recognition of the guidance and counsel that Yosef had provided to Egypt's people and leadership. In other words, he chose to forget his debt to Yosef. [4]

As interesting as this dispute is, it is difficult to understand its importance. What difference does it make – in term of the overall account of the redemption from Egypt – whether the king was actually new to the throne or only new in his policies? In order to answer this question, we must analyze the dispute more carefully.

In its context, the passage above is providing an explanation for the oppression of Bnai Yisrael by the Egyptians. The Torah tells us that Yosef and his brother had died, Bnai Yisrael prospered in Egypt and then a new king arose who did not know Yosef. There are two ways to understand this last element – the new king. One possibility is that the new king simply was not a contemporary of Yosef. He did not have intimate knowledge of Yosef's contribution to Egypt. To him Yosef was an historical figure without relevance to the current



age. What was real was the prosperity of Bnai Yisrael. Faced with the phenomenon of this astounding prosperity and lacking any sense of debt to Yosef, the king exhibited the same xenophobia that has surfaced over and over again in our own times. However, according to Shmuel, this king knew Yosef. He chose to ignore his contribution to Egypt. Why was he compelled to engage in this fanciful denial? He must have felt threatened by Yosef or by something that Yosef represented.

There is a fascinating comment made by our Sages regarding Yosef's power and influence. Our Sages assert for forty years Yosef served as the minister of Paroh. In the following forty years, Yosef's power eclipsed that of Paroh and his influence extended over the entire civilized world.[5] With this comment as a backdrop, it is not difficult to identify the probable roots of Paroh's attitude towards Yosef. After Yosef's death, Paroh began to see Yosef as a usurper whose power and influence had surpassed that of the throne of Egypt. Paroh's battle was not an expression of xenophobic paranoia. It was an attempt to reestablish the position of the Parohs to its former – pre-Yosef – zenith. In other words, the destruction of Bnai Yisrael was an attempt to erase the memory of an embarrassing episode in the history of the Paroh's. It was an attempt to rewrite that history.

Viewed in this manner, Rav and Shmuel's provide two opposing perspectives on the conflict between Moshe and Paroh. According to Rav, Moshe's conflict was with Paroh as an individual. As an individual, Paroh was an evil, paranoid racist. But according to Shmuel, Moshe's conflict was not

a personal battle. Paroh was attempting to reassert the supremacy of the authority of the Parohs through the oppression and destruction of Bnai Yisrael. Moshe was battling this corrupted expression of political authority.

Perhaps, these two perspectives are also reflected in the dispute between Rebbi Yannai, Rebbi Yochanan and Resh Lakish. Rebbi Yochanan and Rebbi Yanai's position corresponds very well with Rav's position. Paroh's hatred of Bnai Yisrael was an expression of his own personal wickedness. Accordingly, Moshe opposed Paroh on a personal level. But he did not allow the dispute to turn into a battle with authority. But according to Shmuel, Paroh's entire campaign against Bnai Yisrael stemmed from an attempt to reassert the power of the Parohs and to destroy a people – Bnai Yisrael – that were a reminder of the former weakness of the Parohs. From this perspective, Resh Lakish's position makes sense. Moshe needed to prove that Paroh's reinterpretation of kingship was corrupt. No king can be the omnipotent ruler that Paroh would have the world accept. For Moshe win this battle, he was required to publicly humiliate Paroh. And according to Resh Lakish this was accomplished when Paroh's own servant abandoned him to beg Moshe's mercy. ■

[1] Mesechet Zevachim 102:a.

[2] Mesechet Avot 3:2.

[3] Mesechet Zevachim 102:a.

[4] Rabbaynu Shlomo ben Yitzchak (Rashi), Commentary on Sefer Shemot 1:8.

[5] Pirkai De'Rebbi Eliezer, chapter 10.

# How God Teaches Man II

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM



We recently studied how God informed Moses of his error in his perception of his role, sending some type of serpent to afflict him, near-death. This taught Moses that he was in fact “dispensable” in God’s plan to redeem the Jews.

God uses precise wisdom in each and every one of His actions. From the very creation of the universe, through His miracles, His revelation at Sinai, His prophetic discourses with man, and His rewards and punishments, each and every instance is orchestrated with exact precision, and with definite reason. By examining each case, we may come to understand exactly why God related to one man in this way, and another in a different manner. We can learn why in one case God would speak to a man, while in another, an event is used to educate another individual. In Moses’ case, he required to learn that his role was unnecessary for God’s plan: God may achieve His objectives through many means, and man, any man, cannot become indispensable. Therefore, God’s method of instructing Moses of his dispensability was just that: God brought Moses near death. What better method to teach of one’s dispensability?

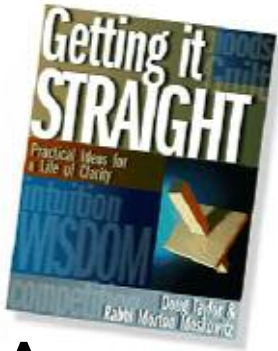
God did not desire to simply destroy Pharaoh and Egypt. As the Medrash states, “God said to His angels, ‘You wish to sing while the works of My hands are drowning in the Red Sea?’” Meaning, God desires that all humankind recognize Him, and benefit from the best life, as outlined in His Torah. God created man and woman - not “Jew” and “Gentile”. Other religions are mankind’s corrupt inventions which Judaism in part seeks to correct. God desires all members of mankind enjoy the best life. When the Egyptian army required extermination, it was not God’s original plan for these men, those who could have lived a life of wisdom. It was for this reason that God sent a host of plagues: each one carrying a unique lesson aimed at extricating Egypt from its philosophy of sub-deities, replacing their fallacy with truths about God. As the Egyptians’ flaw was the belief in powers other than God, God responded by displaying that He alone controls every object and law in the universe. The first three plagues displayed God’s control of the Earth; the second three, events on the Earth; and the last three, His control of the heavens. God displayed His complete and absolute control over the heavens, the Earth, and all between them. No stone was left unturned. Egypt realized that their assumed gods were in fact imaginations, and that the God of the Hebrews was in fact the true, One and only God. Again we see that God’s response perfectly addressed man’s corruptions. For this reason we also read that God judged the Egyptian gods, melting metal idols, and rotting the wooden ones. (Rashi on Exod. 12:12) Through witnessing the very destruction of their carved and molten idols, Egypt was forced

to recognize their gods as useless, and something else – God – is in total control.

Whatever the circumstances are, and whatever the need of that person or people, God’s response will match perfectly. We also cited the words of God’s prophet Malachi, “I am God, I do not change...” (Malachi, 3:6) This teaches man that as God is without defect, He remains this way – nothing can affect Him. But this also teaches that God’s methods of instructing humankind do not change: He continues to employ precise wisdom as the fabric that woven through all of His actions, which are truly to educate us. Therefore, we must not forfeit any precious chance to educate ourselves by studying His actions. As God worked in the times of the Bible, and in previous generations, He continues to work.

But we also learn that God teaches man by way of subtle indication, in place of outright clarity, because God does not desire that mankind simply “hear His word”, and respond, without thinking. For this reason, Revelation at Sinai was a one-time event, “A great voice that did not continue.” (Deut. 5:19) This outright, undeniable proof of God’s existence was necessary. However, not being present at Sinai, we, the future generation, would require intelligence to derive this proof of God’s existence. God does not wish to create miracles always, and thus writes, “A great voice that did not continue.” Miracles are not God’s plan for mankind’s approach to Him.

God’s plan for mankind is to observe the universe, and with his intellect, understand the nature of things. Study of God’s created world and Bible (Torah) is man’s sole objective. To enable Moses to accomplish this, God did not communicate his sin in words, but displayed his sin – through an event – which afforded Moses the opportunity to “study God’s relationship to the world.” Without an event, Moses would have lost the opportunity to engage his mind. Only by witnessing the very real operation of the world, does man acknowledge a “reality” to God’s methods. This is how man attains wisdom. God’s methods of interacting with man are cryptic. Otherwise, there would be nothing compelling us to seek deeper wisdom. We would be at a dead end as soon as we exhausted our study of the limited, physical characteristics of the world. But God’s knowledge has no limits. He therefore created a system of “cryptic indication” which on the surface gives us one message. But if we seek additional understanding through analysis, much more wisdom and information will disclose itself. Both, the physical world and His Biblical and Prophetic words are designed in this manner. In both arenas, much knowledge awaits us...but only if we engage the mind – the only tool capable of unveiling God’s wisdom. ■



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

# Ambition

**DOUG TAYLOR & RABBI MORTON MOSKOWITZ**

"So do you think I'll be hearing from the PGA any day soon?"

My golfing companion, the King of Rational Thought, smiled and waited patiently as I racked up three more strokes just getting to the green. It was easy to see why my score was approximately double his. My last shot sliced so bad that I might as well have been aiming for the 7th hole at Everett Municipal. Except we were playing Harbour Pointe.

"Hmm," I said after sinking a tricky one-foot putt. "Eight strokes on a par three hole. Maybe I need to get more ambitious about this game."

"I'm not sure that your natural aptitudes are most efficiently optimized by this game," said the King of Rational Thought tactfully. "Besides, ambition is bondage."

"Ambition is what?" I asked, gathering my clubs.

"Ambition is bondage," he replied.

My curiosity antenna shot up. "What do you mean?"

"Well, first of all, let's define our terms," he said as we made our way across the freshly mowed grass. "What is ambition?"

"It's motivation," I replied. "It's the umph that makes you perform or go after a goal."

"Be more precise," he said. "If you stop there, ambition is the same as motivation. What makes it different?"

I laid my bag down as we arrived at the next tee. "Well, it seems like ambition goes beyond motivation. It's almost like an extra ego push to get you to achieve something."

"Very good," he said, pushing a biodegradable tee into the well-worn turf. "Let me summarize it this way. Ambition is when you go beyond what is practical."

He effortlessly directed his first shot straight

down the fairway.

"How does that tie in with bondage? I asked, pulling out my favorite and only wood.

"Bondage is like slavery," he answered. "And when you are driven to do more than is practical and reasonable, the ambition is controlling you, not the other way around."

I teed off, caught the ball on the edge of the club, and sent it flying 40 feet onto the adjacent fairway. At this rate, my only hope of getting a ball to the 18th green before the weekend appeared to be Federal Express.

"Consider this," he said, as we gathered our bags. "Do you like scrambled eggs?"

Scrambled eggs?

"Uh, yeah," I said, wondering if he had shifted topics to lunch.

"And would you agree that it's normal for someone to like scrambled eggs and to even have some left over in the refrigerator?"

"Yes."

"What would you say about someone who has an entire basement filled with scrambled eggs?"

I looked at him. "I'd say they were nuts."

"And you'd be right," he said. "Having a modest supply of some commodity you need may be prudent. To continue to store up something beyond the quantity needed for the remainder of your life is, as you say, nuts. More precisely, we'd probably classify it as insane."

I stopped in the middle of the fairway as my brain scored a hole in one.

"Millionaires," I said quietly.

"Yes," he said. "Look at how many wealthy people, having clearly accumulated enough



money to cover all their practical needs for the rest of their lives, continue to work to accumulate more. What's driving them? Not practicality. Some of those people, and maybe all of them, are unable to let go enough to relax and enjoy what they have. Ambition becomes their master."

He paused, then added, "I understand that one of the richest men in the world was once asked how much money is enough. His reply was, 'just a little bit more'."

I pondered the implications of this as I drove my ball back onto our fairway. "I see your point," I said. "Sounds like I'd be a lot better off giving up ambition about golf and just enjoying the game. Besides, it makes economic sense."

"How's that?" he asked.

"Well, we both paid the same green fee, right?"

"Yes."

"So with my score, I'm getting to play twice as much as you." ■

# Proving Sinai

**Reader:** In the December 13, 2004 issue of JewishTimes, Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim wrote a reply to Micha Berger's blog entry titled "The Kuzari Proof, part I." Unfortunately Ben-Chaim's argument is based on false premises. I have written a brief response to Ben-Chaim's article, which I have included below.

Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim wrote: "No historical account witnessed by masses was successfully transmitted, unless it truly occurred." This is incorrect. I can list several of such accounts. Matthew 14 records an incident where Jesus miraculously produced enough food to feed 5,000 men and an unstated number of women and children.

**Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim:** I do not doubt that once a story is accepted on faith, that the adherents may believe all parts, such as this one. But you must realize that these purported stories were not passed on by any supposed "witnesses", but were written decades later...many decades. Had these stories transpired in reality and not in man's imagination, these 5000 witnesses would have told others, and there would be no "breach" of decades in transmission.

What you suppose happened is that the story did in fact take place, but that all present were silent for decades. If so, how would the story surface decades later and be believed, if no one claimed it occurred? The "silence" testifies to this story's fabrication. All true, historical events are transmitted from its moment of occurrence, without breach, and throughout time until today. But once a doctrine is believed without proof, those accepting such a "blind faith" credo, have no problem accepting other fabrications on this very same blind faith.

**Reader:** According to Irish mythology, the ancestors of the Irish fought a war against a race of magical gods in Ireland to conquer the country. Modern historians reject the claim that this conquest occurred. Yet in the Middle Ages it was widely accepted as history, and some Irish people still consider it to be historical today. Also, according to a Christian myth, a dragon terrorized the residents of Libya. St. George killed this dragon before becoming a saint. Many Christians in Libya and elsewhere later accepted this story to be historical.



**Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim:** Read what you wrote, "According to 'mythology'..." You confuse yourself, viewing myth and fact as equal. If some account is referred to as "myth", understand that the transmitters intended to differ its credibility, from real life "history" and not imagined myth. Do not use such myths as arguments against the truth of the Sinaic "history".

**Reader:** In 1968 the Virgin Mary was reportedly witnessed by about 200,000 witnesses over of a Coptic Church in Zeitoun, Egypt: "In 1968 at the Coptic St. Mary's Church in Zeitoun, Egypt, two Muslim mechanics noticed a figure on the roof of the church. Thinking the figure was a nun who intended to jump, they contacted the church's priest and the emergency squad. People gathered and viewed the figure for a few minutes before it disappeared. The figure materialized again a week later, and continued to disappear and materialize until 1971. Witnesses claimed the figure was human in shape, white or bluish-white in color, and was sometimes accompanied by "doves of light." It was believed to be the Virgin Mary. It has been estimated that hundreds of thousands of individuals witnessed the phenomenon before it disappeared completely in 1971."

**Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim:** Suggesting 200,000 people witnessed something does not compare to hearing the testimony "from those 200,000 themselves" which did not happen. No one ever produced these supposed 200,000 witnesses; they merely reproduced a "story" including that number. Be clear on this distinction: anyone can write an account that there were "5000 who Jesus fed", or "200,000 who saw Virgin Mary on a roof". But history is not proved based

on the story alone. It requires the "testimony" of these many people. This is absent in stories of Jesus and in this Virgin Mary account.

Additionally, the story loses all credibility by stating, "It was believed to be the Virgin Mary." It was "believed" and not proven in any manner whatsoever. There is no comparison. The Jews saw and transmitted en masse what they agreed in their very account to have seen "with their own eyes". In contrast, your account describes what people "believed" to be Virgin Mary by a non-existent group of 200,000. An exact number of Jews saw a specific mountain engulfed in flames, and heard intelligent words emanating from that mountain. We know the exact mountain, the date, who these people were, where they came from, how long they were there, and where they went to. There is also no breach in the Torah's accounts, which is not the case regarding the story of Jesus.

**Reader:** Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim wrote: "This is the proof used to validate all historical events." This is incorrect. To determine the accuracy of an historical claim, historians generally evaluate evidence contemporary to the claim in question. The Torah is not very strong evidence of the revelation at Sinai, since we cannot confirm precisely when the Torah was written, and because there is no independent evidence corroborating it.

**Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim:** We know the exact date to be the Hebrew year 2448. And this argument of independent evidence is flawed. How exactly do additional, independent sources create greater credibility? How do aliens offer better proof than the actual witnesses? Do you feel George Washington's existence would be doubted without corroboration for people in Hungary for

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example? If you refer to mass conspiracy being removed by alien corroboration, then you assume mass conspiracy may exist, and you have not proven this is in fact a truth. In truth, mass conspiracy cannot exist: one lies only when motivated, and masses cannot share a common motive. For this reason, mass conspiracy can never occur.

**Reader:** Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim wrote: "This is why we accept Caesar as having existed; even if no artifacts had been found." This is incorrect. We have many artifacts of Julius Caesar, such as coins. We also have documents written by Julius Caesar himself, and documents written by other authors who lived during and shortly after his existence.

**Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim:** You did not read what I wrote; yet you decided to respond anyway! I wrote, "This is why we accept Caesar as having existed (i.e., unanimous history) even if no artifacts had been found." This means that artifacts are unnecessary. But you go on to state that artifacts were in fact found. I don't deny this, but artifacts cannot further prove, that which is already proven. And the lack of artifacts cannot disprove that which is proven.

**Reader:** Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim wrote: "A people will not transmit Moses' words 'Lest your eyes forget' (Deut.4:9), had they not witnessed the event." Perhaps not, but there is no reason why future generations would not if they had no contradictory recollections of their national history.

**Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim:** You refer to future generations, while I refer to how the story commenced and traveled through the ages. Your response to a 'portion' of history does not refute my discussion of "all of history". You also admit to this argument at the outset, so why try to argue against it?

**Reader:** Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim wrote: "Had they not witnessed Sinai, surely there would be in our hands today, the 'true' story of those Jews." You seem to have a considerable amount of faith in the reliability of oral tradition. In fact, evidence demonstrates that oral tradition tends to be very unreliable.

**Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim:** In fact, you live your life by second hand knowledge, or "oral tradition": you never witnessed your doctor attending medical school. Yet, you place your life in his hands.

**Reader:** Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim wrote: "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." In fact, we do possess several variations of the plagues of the Exodus in the writings of ancient Jewish authors. There are also differences of opinion among the Sages concerning what the Jews witnessed and heard at Sinai.

**Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim:** Yes, I am familiar that the Sages differ as to what exactly was heard, but none deny that miraculous event where all the Jews heard intelligent words emanating from fire. Similarly, many dispute the details of many historical events, but none dispute their fact, locations, years, etc.

But my main point was that there are no alternative accounts of where the Jews were in 2448, which oppose them having been at Sinai. Also, no story suggests the Jews were not slaves in Egypt, that Moses did not exist, and that the 10 Plagues did not take place. Regardless of what authors write, how many write contrary stories, or how respected these authors are...they cannot abrogate the authoritative history in the Torah. The original remains eternally the "authoritative" account.

Many writers seek fame through opposing accepted history. Such strategies certainly launch them to stardom, achieving what they truly wish. Holocaust deniers too do not concern themselves with establishing truth, but in establishing their reputations. ■

## Proof & Morality

### Judaism vs Christianity

**Reader:** I would like to respond to Rabbi Ben Chaim's article of the falsehood of Christianity. Although I agree with him that Christianity is false and that Jesus was certainly not G-d nor His son nor anything of the sort, some of the Rabbi's arguments were faulty.

The Rabbi writes that the revelation at Sinai is a historically proven event and one witnessed by 2.5 million people. This is a matter of faith not history. There is simply not enough proof for the exodus from Egypt, and even biblical scholars who accept that an exodus did happen totally

reject the number of Israelites leaving Egypt being in the millions. This can be seen in the other books of the Tanakh. Canaan itself did not have a population of 2.5 million, so if the Jews had those numbers, conquest of Israel should have been easy- but even as the Tanakh demonstrates, conquest was not easy and even in David's time, the Jews were still fighting for control of the country! Anyway, to say that the revelation at Sinai is a proven historical event is simply not true. Furthermore, Muslims believe that during one important battle waged by Muhammad, a mountain moved by G-d's will. This event was witnessed by thousands of people- do you as a Jew believe it simply because the event had a large number of witnesses?

Secondly, Rabbi Ben Chaim says that Christianity is actually a religion of hate. Certainly horrific things were done by Christians in the name of Jesus, but the Israelites slaughtered Canaanite men, women and children; was that any less hateful? The Gospel says to love thy neighbor as thyself and to do unto others, as you would have them do unto you. I am sorry, but I do not see how this makes Christianity a religion of hatred.

Furthermore, to claim that Christianity promotes blind faith whereas Judaism requires reason and intelligence is nonsense. Christianity has produced thousands of thoughtful philosophers and theologians; it is not a religion of idiots. For us Jews to believe (according to Genesis) that plants were created before the sun- how does that demonstrate reasoning and critical thinking? I want to stress again, I am not a Christian, but when my fellow Jews make stupid and even offensive arguments against Christianity, it does us all a disservice.

*Sincerely Yours,  
Benjamin Rodkin*

**Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim:** You claim there is insufficient evidence for the numbers of Jews being 2.5 million at Sinai. You make at least two careless and inexcusable errors: 1) you speak before reviewing all the facts, as you will see that not only does the Torah record 600,000 men over 20 (excluding women and children of both sexes), but the book of Samuel 400 years later addresses our numbers as 3 million; 2) you do not follow reason as you readily accept that a mountain moved for Mohammed, based on and "undefined" number of witnesses, but when much larger numbers recorded in detail are found leaving Egypt and at Sinai, you dismiss it, accepting the few over the many.

In the book of Samuel II, Chap. 24:9, we read: "Joab gave the sum of the number of the people

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## Letters

to the king (King David); in Israel there were 800,000 men of war, and the men of Judah, 500,000 men." These were men above 20 years of age, and this number excluded all women. If we conservatively add to these 1.3 million men above 20, the number of 200,000 men below 20, and again conservatively assume the women equaled the number of men, they too being a total of 1.5 million, we arrive at 3 million Jews. Now, King David lived 400 years after Revelation at Sinai, where the Rabbis claimed there were 2.5 million Jews. As generations reproduce exponentially, these 2.5 million Jews at Sinai have no problem growing to 3 million in 400 years.

Now, suggesting thousands of people witnessed something, does not compare to hearing the testimony "from the witnesses themselves" which did not happen in your case of Mohammed. These supposed witnesses never passed on this event to others, regarding a mountain moving. Islam merely reproduced a story including that number and event, seeking credibility. Be clear on this distinction: anyone can write an account that there were 5000 who Jesus fed, or 200,000 who saw Virgin Mary on a roof in the late 1960's. But history is not proved based on the story alone, for anyone can write a story and include numbers. Mass acceptance of Jesus' miracles proves that stories will be believed without proof. The question here is what is conclusive proof.

Proof requires the "testimony" of those many people, if they truly existed. This is absent in your story of Mohammed, in accounts of Jesus' miracles, in connection with Mary on the roof, and in connection with all other man made religions. In contrast, the event at Sinai was passed down by those attendees, and even accepted by other religions, including Islam and Christianity. Even more, the people at Sinai testified that their own eyes saw the miracles. This constitutes part of the transmission, and this element would not be transmitted if those there saw nothing. Parenthetically, Islam is so corrupt, it even claims responsibility for giving Moses to the Jews, and Jesus to the Christians. It is quite amusing.

Your second argument is that Judaism also killed many people, and should equally be referred to as a "religion of hate", as I labeled Christianity. Your mistake here is that when the Jews killed in the examples you gave, they did so at God's command. As such, they did not act from their own "viciousness" as did the Christian Crusades, but they followed the words of the one God who alone defines morality. If God says in certain cases man must kill others, then such actions are not acts of baseless hatred, but they are acts of following God. God too exterminated

the world with a Flood. Do you take issue with His rights as Creator in this case? If not, then you cannot take issue when He gives His word to man to kill.

Your last argument is that Christianity is based on reason, as they too have thoughtful theologians in their midst. It appears your definition of "thoughtful" differs from mine. One example suffices to dispute your claim that Christianity follows reason, but I will offer a few: Christian theologians readily embrace the concept that God is one and three simultaneously. Such acceptance is a clear demonstration that one may truly be a theologian while abandoning any semblance of reason. It is akin to suggesting that something is fully black, and it is fully white at the same moment. This also contradicts God's words, "Hear Israel, God is our God, God is one." (Deut. 6:4) Add to this the four contradictory Gospels; the twisting of Biblical verses to force Jesus into the Old Testament; and Jesus' supposed birth with no father yet claiming the necessary patrilineal descent to the Davidic dynasty to crown him Messiah. Christianity defends impossible notions, contradicts God, and is therefore not a reasonable system. Its theologians by definition share the same fault.

While it is true that plants were created before the sun, it is also true that they were created after the "light", although not emanating yet from the sun. You incorrectly assume that how the Earth operates now, must have been how it operated in its formation; that plants at that moment of creation possessed all their fixed laws of growth, as we witness today, and required sunlight. Maimonides dedicates an entire chapter to this error, made by others: one cannot view the current state of any object, assuming it always functioned this way, certainly not at its formation. "Formation" means as something is yet incomplete...hence, all the laws we see today could not have been possessed by anything during its formation.

We have successfully proved from Scriptures you carelessly omit that, 1) 2.5 million Jews is a tenable number of Sinai attendees; 2) through reason we proved that Christianity defends numerous, irrational positions and that its "thoughtful" theologians cannot remove its flaws; and 3) that God's act of creation is not subject to your critique based on your analysis of current natural law, as taught by Maimonides.

To conclude, I will quote Maimonides, addressing your last error. I urge your reading of the entire chapter, this is but the first paragraph: (Guide for the Perplexed, Book II, Chap. XVII):

*"EVERYTHING produced comes into existence from non-existence; even when the*

*substance of a thing has been inexistence, and has only changed its form, the thing itself, which has gone through the process of genesis and development, and has arrived at its final state, has now different properties from those which it possessed at the commencement of the transition from potentiality to reality, or before that time. Take, e.g., the human ovum as contained in the female's blood when still included in its vessels: its nature is different from what it was in the moment of conception, when it is met by the semen of the male and begins to develop: the properties of the semen in that moment are different from the properties of the living being after its birth when fully developed. It is therefore quite impossible to infer from the nature which a thing possesses after having passed through all stages of its development, what the condition of the thing has been in the moment when this process commenced: nor does the condition of a thing in this moment show what its previous condition has been. If you make this mistake, and attempt to prove the nature of a thing in potential existence by its properties when actually existing, you will fall into great confusion: you will reject evident truths and admit false opinions."* ■



# Moses' Mission & Pharaoh's Free Will

**RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM**

*I thank my friend Abe for raising this issue last Shabbos, Rabbi Reuven Mann for his insights, and Rabbi Pesach for directing me to essential sources on this matter.*

## Two Purposes of the Plagues

Exod. 7:1-5:

*"And God said to Moses, 'Recognize, I have positioned you as a judge to Pharaoh, and Aaron your brother will be your prophet. You speak all that I command you, and Aaron your brother will speak to Pharaoh to send the Children of Israel from his land. And I will harden Pharaoh's heart, [1] and I will increase My signs and My wonders in the land of Egypt. And Pharaoh will not listen to you, and I will place My hand to Egypt and I will take out My hosts, My people the Children of Israel from the land of Egypt with [2] great judgments. And Egypt will know that I am God when I stretch forth My hand on Egypt and I take out the Children of Israel from their midst.'"*

God instructs Moses to speak to Pharaoh that he should free the Jews. God tells Moses that he knows Pharaoh will not free them, as He will harden Pharaoh's heart. God states the goal of hardening Pharaoh is to create wonders in Egypt, that Egypt will know God. One goal is for [1] Egypt's edification and hopefully, repentance. The verse also indicates that there is another goal, [2] "great judgments". What are these "judgments"?

(An important principle is spelled out by the Sforno on Exod. 7:3. He states that God's plagues are to allow Egypt to "recognize His greatness and goodness and repent in a truthful repentance". We

must recognize God's kindness in such an act: Man sins, and is justly punished. However, before meting out punishments, God educates the Egyptians to their sin via the plagues. He does one more act to afford the sinners a path to repentance, and to circumvent any punishment. We learn that God works additional kindness and gives man opportunities to correct his ways, before receiving punishment, or the loss of his soul.)

Just prior to the eighth plague, the Plague of Locusts, the Torah reiterates these two goals:

Exod. 10:1-2:

*"God said to Moses, 'Come to Pharaoh because I have hardened his heart and the heart of his servants in order [1] that I place these signs of Mine in his midst. And in order to speak in the ears of your son and your grandson that which I have [2] mocked Egypt, and My signs which I have placed in them, and they shall know that I am God.'"*

(Before proceeding, I wish to clarify the term "mock". When applied to, or used by God, we cannot understand it as God expressing human characteristics of *derisio*. "laugh at", or to "mock", in connection with God, means He is assured of the sinner's downfall. So "certain" is God, it is as if He laughs, like a human would when he warns another of a negative result, yet the other person does not heed the warning, and inevitably suffers. The one who warned will say, "I told you so", as if to laugh at the ignorance of the other. God is said to "mock" Egypt, as their downfall is inevitable. God's warnings and knowledge are absolute, so one is wise to follow God exactly. Egypt didn't, so their devastation was certain.)

Here we see a new point, a "mocking" of Egypt, explained as God's withholding Pharaoh from repenting - the hardening his heart. Rashi says this means a laughing of sorts. Ramban says, "I (God) laugh at him (Pharaoh) that I harden his heart, and do vengeance in him..." From these two verses, we learn two distinct purposes in the 10 plagues: Verse 10:1 teaches: [1] that God multiply His wonders for Egypt to learn of Him, and verse 10:2 teaches: [2] that the Jews repeat this to their descendants that God removes Pharaoh's (man's) ability to repent, and that He and His miracles are made known. Clearly, Moses continuously approaches Pharaoh, knowing all too well that Pharaoh will not free the Jews. But Moses is commanded by God to do so, as God's purpose is to [1] publicize His name and [2] demonstrate His justice as meted out in Pharaoh's inability to repent.

This 2nd point is not too well known. The plagues' spectacular nature attracts our emotions to the visual phenomena. However, as 10:2 states, God also wished to "mock" Egypt. He desired that this principle of withholding repentance become clear. The Torah commentaries state, (paraphrased) "...it is unusual that a man can face such plagues of Hail, Locusts, and the like, and still remain obstinate. Man's nature is to be terrified, not to maintain his stubbornness." Such a steadfast attitude, even after receiving blow upon blow, is not natural for man, and must be by God's word. Pharaoh's resistance is to be a prime focus of the plagues. Moses' mission is to bring out into the open this aspect of God's justice: when man is too far-gone, God will restrain him from repenting. The plagues are to demonstrate how God does not allow a terribly corrupt person to repent. Intuitively, we would think that any man who sins, should be afforded the ability to repent. Why then in such a deviant person, does God withhold repentance? What is the justice in this restraint?

## Questions on the Loss of Repentance

1) In his laws of Repentance, chapter 5, Maimonides teaches that man is always the cause of his free will. If so, what did God do to Pharaoh that prevented him from freeing the Jews and from repenting? How does God "harden" Pharaoh's heart?

2) If God hardens Pharaoh's heart, and therefore, Pharaoh does not free the Jews, is it just that God punish Pharaoh?

3) In his Laws of Repentance, chapter 6, Maimonides states that a person may sin a very evil sin, or sin many times, until the sentence from God will be to remove his ability to repent, and that the sinner die in his sin which he did knowingly with his will at the outset. Maimonides states that Pharaoh's stubbornness is an example of this principle. What is the justice in this principle of "removal of repentance"?

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4) In law 6:3 of his Laws on Repentance, Maimonides repeats eight times that the sinner sinned "on his own". What is Maimonides driving at? Ramban too states in Exod 7:3 that Pharaoh was punished with the loss of his repenting ability, as he initially sinned with his "own free will". How does this help us understand God's justice?

5) Ramban offers two reasons for the justice of Pharaoh's inability to repent. One reason given is that Pharaoh's repentance would not have been genuine, but merely a tactic to remove the ever increasing pain of each successive plague. As the plagues progressed, Ramban teaches that Pharaoh became more inclined to free the Jews, and he would have, after the fifth plague. However, God removed his ability to repent, and he did not free them. We must ask: If Pharaoh's repentance would not have been genuine, then what is the difference if he does or doesn't verbalize his repentance? Why does God deem it necessary that Pharaoh not utter his repentance, if it would be meaningless, as Ramban states?

6) In law 6:2, Maimonides says that repentance acts as a "shield" against punishment. Does Maimonides' statement have bearing on this

Ramban above? Is repentance an absolute protection against punishment, and therefore God "had" to prevent Pharaoh from uttering even unguenuine words?

### The Plagues' Purpose: A Point of No Return

Despite Pharaoh's inability to concede to Moses' demand, Maimonides states that Moses' repeated approach to Pharaoh is to teach an important lesson: "In order to make known to those who enter the world, that when God holds back repentance from the sinner, he is not able to repent, but [rather] he dies in his evil that he initially committed with his own will." We are taught a crucial lesson: Man can sin to the point of no return.

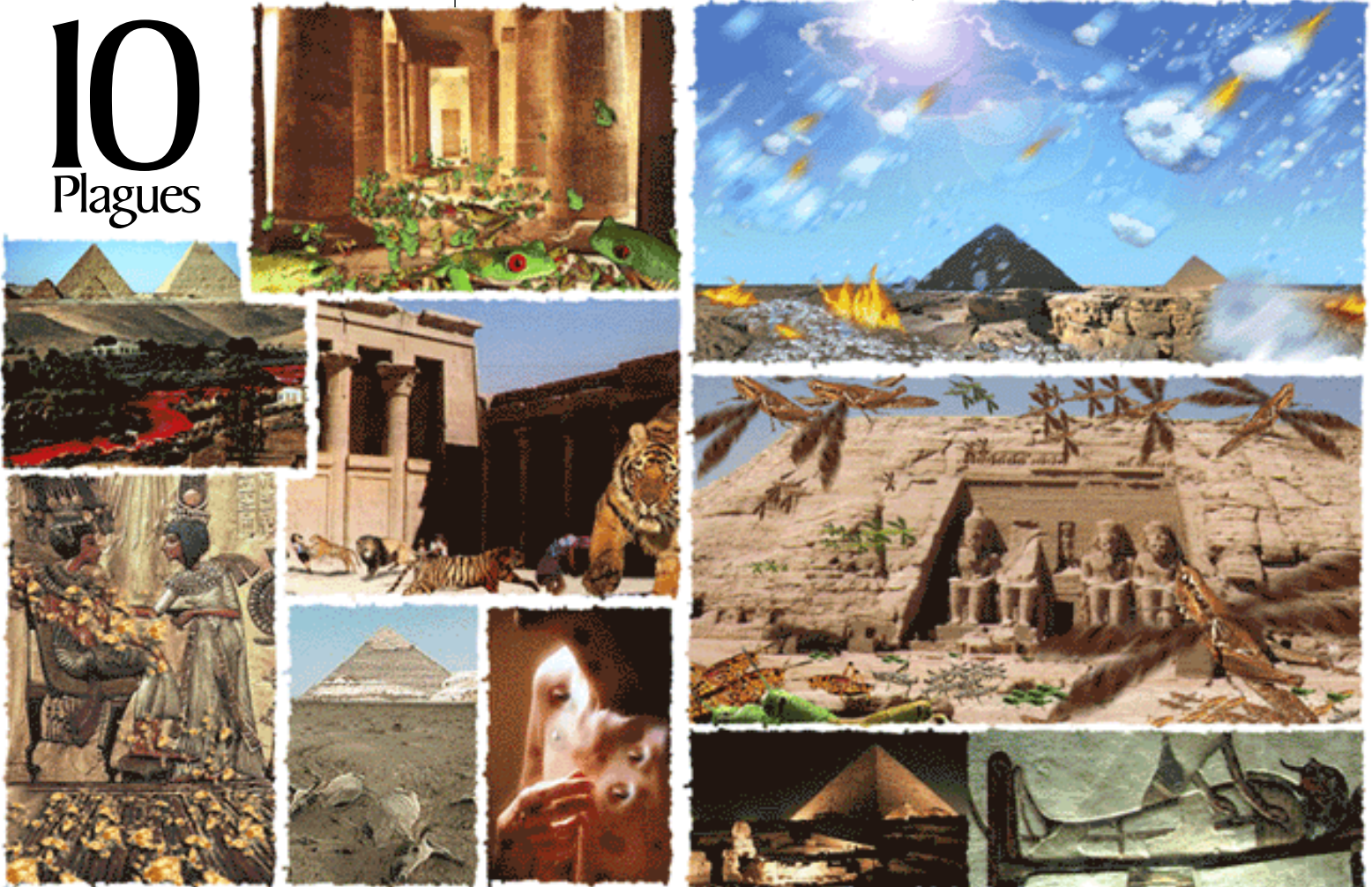
Part of our human design - our free will - allows us to steep ourselves in corruption, to the point that we can no longer extricate ourselves. This was God's lesson to the world through restraining Pharaoh from repenting. He is the prime example of man's ability to reach a point with no hope for repentance. God publicized Pharaoh's corruption as an act of kindness to "all others who enter the world", as Maimonides states. God teaches an invaluable lesson. If we forfeit this lesson, tragically, we can lose our eternal life.

### Hardening of Pharaoh's Heart

There are a few ways to understand God's restraint on man's ability to repent: Man reaches the point of no return, so God merely "reflects" man's own corruption by withholding an unguenuine repentance. Rabbi Mann suggested a second theory: that man can do some form of repentance, but God does not allow him, as God's mercy grants repentance to man, but only up to a point, and no further. Accordingly, man is punished for the sins he initially committed on his own. God is kind to allow man repentance, but God determines for how long repentance remains available. So we must look at God's ultimate restraint on repentance in an opposite light: It is not a cruelty that He removes repentance, but a kindness that He tolerates sinners for so long. According to theory #1, man sins to the point where he is completely and irrevocably corrupt. He has the ability to go through the motions of repenting to avoid pain, but God does not allow him this right. In this case, God mirrors the sinner's exact corruption - he cannot truly repent, so God does not allow the act of a useless repentance.

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# 10 Plagues



**Ramban: Preventing Ungenuine Repentance**

Ramban indicates that repentance is a shield against punishments - the question is how. To reiterate, Ramban's second answer for God restraining Pharaoh from repenting is as follows: "Pharaoh's repentance would not have been genuine, but merely a tactic to remove the ever increasing pain of each successive plague." Therefore, he was not allowed to repent. Had he repented - even for this wrong reason - Ramban indicates it would have been effective in some manner. Thus, God prevented his repentance. How may we explain this Ramban?

Discussing this issue with Rabbi Mann, we agreed as follows: Had God allowed Pharaoh to repent an unguenuine repentance, Pharaoh would justly deserve continued plagues, as the plagues' purpose of Pharaoh recognizing God would not be realized. However, Egypt would see Pharaoh "repenting" and would have a gripe against God's justice. They would not know that Pharaoh repented a false repentance, and would feel God is unjust to continue plaguing Egypt. We may suggest this explanation for the Ramban: for this reason, God did not allow Pharaoh's false impression of repentance. Such repentance would be of no use to Pharaoh's perfection, but it mattered to others, to Egypt. Rabbi Mann stated that Moses too was concerned that if God justly killed the Jews when they sinned with the Golden Calf, Egypt would say that God failed and smote his people in the desert. Due to the concern that all mankind recognize God as just, Moses asked God, "Why should Egypt say, 'with evil He took them out of Egypt to kill them in the mountains and to consume them from off the face of Earth...'" (Exod. 32:12) Moses did not desire Egypt to possess a false impression of God. What perfection Moses displays...even after hundreds of years of bondage, Moses has concern for God's reputation in his oppressors' eyes. Moses teaches that we must be concerned that God's reputation be completely just. We care that all mankind obtain the truth.

**Maimonides: Free Will and a Hardened Heart - a Contradiction?**

Maimonides states in his Laws of Repentance, chapter 5, God never removes one's free will. He calls this a "great fundamental". This makes sense, as the Torah is a system where 'reward and punishment' is a cornerstone. Thus, man must always be the sole cause of his actions. How then do we understand Maimonides' theory on God hardening Pharaoh's heart? In his Laws of Repentance 6:3, Maimonides writes, "And it is possible that man sin a great sin, or many sins, until the judgment is given before the True Judge that the punishment for this sinner on these sins that he did with his will and his knowledge, is that repentance is prevented from him, and he is not allowed permission to return from his evil so that he should

die and expire in his sin that he did...Therefore it is written in the Torah, 'and I will harden Pharaoh's heart.' Since he sinned initially by himself, and did evil to the Jews living in his land, as it says, 'come, let us be wise', Judgment was passed to prevent repentance from him, until punishment was exacted from him. Therefore, God hardened his heart."

If free will is a fundamental, how can God seemingly violate this principle by preventing Pharaoh from repenting?

Free will is always under man's control. But free will "to do what"? This is the key point: it is the free will to "select evil or good" that God places in man's hand unconditionally. However, God will - in extreme cases - remove our free will to decide another matter: repentance. Eight times Maimonides stresses that man chooses to do good or evil, of "his own will." He wished to clarify this point that free will is never taken away from man in this single area of choosing good or evil. Man will always be the sole cause of this choice. The Torah says this openly, (Deut. 30:15, 19) "See I place before you today, life and good, death an evil...and choose life." Moses tells the people that they may choose between good and evil. This is the area where man is always in control. But in the area of repenting, if man already selected evil and corrupts himself so grievously, God will prevent his free will from selecting repentance, "so he may die and expire in the sin that he did."

There is no contradiction in Maimonides' words. God gives man free will to do good and evil, and never removes this freedom. In one area however, God does compromise man's free will: the area of repentance. Restricting Pharaoh from repenting does not equate to God making him sin. Pharaoh sinned of his own free will, and so grievously, that God's justice demands he be removed from the system of repentance. Had Pharaoh been free to repent, he would avoid punishment he truly deserved. Maimonides argues with Ramban and Sforno on this point. Maimonides holds Pharaoh's repentance would have been genuine. This brings us to our next question.

If Pharaoh's repentance would be a genuine, why did God not allow him to repent? God allows others to repent! Perhaps it is possible that man sin with so much evil, that the normal repentance does not outweigh the evil. Let me explain: In normal cases, man sins, but then it is possible that his remorse for his evil is so genuine, that he is in fact not the same person who sinned. He has complete regret, and resigns himself to never sin this sin again. This is true repentance, when the new state of good in man completely erases any taint of the evil formerly held on to. As man learns the fault of his crimes, and sees clearly how hurtful his action was to himself or others, he now regrets his actions. In such a case, God completely forgives man, and "none of his sins will be remembered." (Ezekiel 18) But it can also happen, that a person sins, and repents, but any

repentance does not completely correct his evil. Repentance can only correct a person up to a point. Repentance can be an injustice, if someone sins so harshly, and would be let off. Just as free will to select good or evil is an institution that God never compromises, so too repentance is always accepted before God. Maimonides states this in law 6:2. This being so, the only solution is to remove repentance so Pharaoh and those like him pay for their crimes. It would be unjust to allow Pharaoh to escape punishment through repentance. How odd it may sound, repentance is not just in this case. The basic concept is that God forgives man, but only up to a certain level of corruption. Man may exceed forgiveness - a point of no return.

**Sforno**

Sforno is of another opinion. He states that had Pharaoh desired to, he could have repented, as "there is nothing preventing him." If this is so, how does Sforno understand the verse that God "hardened Pharaoh's heart"? Sforno explains this as God giving Pharaoh the ability to 'tolerate the plagues'. As Sforno states, if God did not harden his heart, Pharaoh would have freed to Jews, but not out of a desire to subject his will to God, performing a true, complete repentance. Pharaoh would have freed the Jews only to avoid any further pain, "and this is not repentance at all" as Sforno says. Sforno differs from Maimonides and Ramban, in that he contests that God ever inhibits one's path back to God via repentance. Sforno quotes Ezekiel 18:23, "Do I really desire the death of the wicked, so says God? Is it not in his repenting from his path and that he live?" Sforno proves from this verse that God always desires, and makes available, one's repentance. God did not remove repentance from Pharaoh, as suggested by Ramban and Maimonides.

In summary, Moses' mission was twofold: He was to assist in delivering the Plagues so Egypt and the Jews would recognize God. An idolatrous culture would be shown false, and God's system of reward and punishment would be made clear. Additionally, some of our Rabbis teach that Pharaoh's reluctance was publicized to teach mankind that we have the ability to sink into sin, so far, that we have no way of removing ourselves.

It is then so crucial that we all examine our ways, and not forfeit a true, eternal life, due to temporal emotional satisfaction, or false ideas. ■

*For further reading of the original sources, see Maimonides' "Laws of Repentance", chapters V and VI; Maimonides' introduction to Ethics of the Fathers, the "Shmoneh Perakim", Chapter VIII, and sources noted herein.*