

Why were the cherubim on God's Ark housing the Torah, formed like infants? Why were they attached to the Ark?



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Weekly Parsha

Kisisa

RABBI BERNARD FOX

"And I will remove My hand and you will see My back. And My face will not be seen." (Shemot 33:23)

Moshe ascends Mount Sinai. He asks the Almighty to reveal to him His essential nature. Hashem responds that a material being is not

(continued on page 3)

IN THE DARK II

EGYPT TO SINAI

A Daily Journey

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

Last week we observed a very interesting parallel between the Jews' history, and the Temple's structure. We noted that the Jews left animal worship behind them upon their Egyptian exodus. God led them through a desert by way of pillars of smoke and fire, while sustaining them miraculously with the Manna. They arrived at Sinai obtaining God's Torah. These events are directly paralleled by

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God's Pillar
of Cloud



*At the end of the first
Ramban on Parshas
Teruma, Ramban
refers to God as the
"Yoshave Keruvim"
many times, but once,
also refers to Him as
"Yoshave Ha-Adam".

Is Ramban equating
the Cherubs with man?*

the Temple's design: the priests enter the Temple with the animal sacrifice behind them. Inside, they encounter smoke from the Incense Altar, fire from the Menorah, and bread set on the Showbread Table. These are all in service of the primary vessel, the Ark that houses God's Torah. It too is cloaked by a Parochess curtain, as was Sinai cloaked in darkness, rain and cloud.

These phenomena of pillars of smoke, fire, and the Manna, were not simply conveniences, but precisely planned by God. Each served a lesson, not just for the Jews who left Egypt, but also for all future generations. So important are their lessons, they form the design of the Temple: God desired that the Egyptian, terrestrial journey mirror every man and woman's internal journal. We all must leave our own "Egypt". Life is a struggle to abandon our infantile and primitive natures, our own Egypt, and adhere to the truth, embodied by the Menorah's light. And as we said, we temper our knowledge with our admission of our ignorance, conveyed by the Incense Altar's cloud. And if we truly devote ourselves to this mission for which we were created, God's Manna - His providence for our physical needs - will be readily found, just as it was prepared for the Jews. And just as the Manna was miraculous, we too will not understand how God provide as we engage more hours in Torah study than in work, but He does. God wishes that man devote himself more to study, than to accumulation of wealth. The Manna was actually commanded to be on display in the Temple as a proof of God's ability to sustain us. Again we learn: the lessons of the desert are to be permanent lessons. Maimonides also teaches that for one who abandons the life of monetary concerns, devoting himself to study God's Torah, God will provide his needs. (Mishneh Torah: Laws of Shmita and Yovale, 13:13)

As the Jews eventuated at Sinai to obtain the Torah, so too, the Temple's focus is the Ark which houses the Torah. We are reminded daily of our true purpose: to arrive at an ever-increasing love of God. This may only be accomplished by studying His creation and His Torah. We therefore learn how essential it is that we are aware of our inner natures - our primitive and instinctual tendencies. We all possess them. These emotions and drives work on us each day. We must evaluate which urges rule us, understand their destructive natures, and abandon them, or satisfy them properly. But our minds are to rule our emotions, not the reverse. This too was exemplified by the Jews' Passover sacrifice. Before being redeemed, they had to display their disbelief in the

Egyptian animal god. For many, it was too strong a desire, and they perished with the Egyptians in Egypt. One cannot simultaneously adhere to God and an animal deity.

It ends up that all those ancient events are not quite so ancient. It would appear that God desired those events to embody mankind's mission...in each generation. It follows that God commanded our recurring Jewish Holidays to set on permanent display these educational episodes. This journey applies to us all, and Temple is the permanent reminder. There are other similar laws. The new moon for example is said to wax and wane, teaching man that he too may decrease by sin, but like the moon, he may again wax to glow in his perfection. The Rabbis indicate that this is an actual purpose in the design of the moon's orbital phases.

Our internal world is quite hidden, and rarely studied. Temple teaches that matters should be just the opposite: we must examine our natures, admitting our poor character traits, and work on improving them as outlined in the Torah. This is where the Keruvim come in.

The Keruvim, or cherubs, were the childlike, gold figurines, which form the Ark's cover. Why were such images attached to the most prized of all Temple vessels housing God's Torah? What do they have to do with the Torah? The Rabbis teach they were similar in design to an infant.

What is an infant? How is it distinguished? I believe cherubs are to embody man who is not yet distorted; he does not yet follow the instinctual, primitive and idolatrous emotions. He is innocent. Keruvim portray man in his yet, uncorrupted state: a child. This is what the knowledge of Torah (housed under the Keruvim) target. Man should return to that state where his emotions have no affect on him. Keruvim are the focus of the Temple, as man's focus is to return to a state where he is similar to a child in this respect.

The zenith of man's existence is when he is untainted with sin, as a child. But this is joined to his other spiritual element: his soul. Man has two missions, to free himself from his instinctual, and cleave to the intellectual, the world of wisdom. But they work hand in hand: man's attachment to the world of wisdom, (the Tablets inside the Ark), is proportionate to how far he removes himself from the grips of his emotion, the Keruvim. The Ark's dual nature of Tablets and Keruvim above, embody man's dual nature of an intellectual and emotional being.

Although the ancient Jews made but one journey from Egypt to Sinai on the ground, all Jews must journey from "Egypt to Sinai" each and every day. ■

Weekly Parsha

capable of grasping the Divine essence. However, Hashem agrees to allow Moshe to see His back. This apparently means that although we cannot attain an absolute understanding of the Almighty, we are capable of some lower level of comprehension. This more mundane understanding is represented as seeing the Almighty's back.

The Talmud in Tractate Berachot comments on this episode. The Talmud explains that Moshe saw the knot of the teffillin worn by the Almighty on His head. These comments present two obvious difficulties. First, Hashem is not physical. He cannot be conceived as a being wearing teffillin. Second, Maimonides explains that Moshe achieved the highest possible understanding of the Almighty. It did not involve any corporeal element. It is possible that a less perfect individual might attribute some physicality to the Almighty. But how could our Sages claim that Moshe perceived Hashem wearing teffillin?

Rashi, in his commentary on the Talmud, provides some direction in interpreting the Sages' comments. He refers us to a previous text. In this text the Talmud explains that Hashem wears teffillin. The Talmud also deals with the contents of the Almighty's teffillin. The Talmud explains that these teffillin contain the passage, "Who is like Your nation Israel? They are a singular people in the land". This text is also difficult to understand. However, it provides an essential element needed to explain Moshe's vision. In order to appreciate the message of the Talmud, we must place Moshe's vision in context.

Bnai Yisrael had committed the sin of creating and worshiping the egel - the golden calf. This sin altered the relationship between the Almighty and His nation. Moshe wished to reestablish the intimate connection between Hashem and Bnai Yisrael. In this context, Moshe asked Hashem for a revelation of His nature. The Almighty responded by showing Moshe the knot of His teffillin. This vision gave Moshe the knowledge he needed. With this new understanding, he was able to reestablish the relationship damaged by the sin of the egel. In this context, let us reconsider the comments of the Talmud. The Sages explain that the Almighty's teffillin contain a passage that affirm the unique relationship between the Almighty and Bnai Yisrael. In other words, the teffillin represent the bond between Hashem and His people. Moshe could not see the front of Hashem. He could not fully understand the nature of Hashem. He also could not view the front of Hashem's teffillin. This means that the relationship between the Almighty and Bnai Yisrael is a consequence of the Divine essence. Moshe's understanding of the relationship was necessarily limited. Without full understanding of Hashem's nature, he could not fully grasp the

relationship. However, he could see the knot of the teffillin. He was able to study the relationship as an emanation or effect of the Divine essence. An analogy will help illustrate this concept.

Let us compare the Almighty to fire. When the ancient human discovered fire, this unsophisticated individual could not understand the scientific nature of combustion. However, our ancestors could study the effect of fire and heat on different substances. The study of these phenomena did not require a complete comprehension of fire itself. Similarly, Moshe could not understand the ultimate nature of the Almighty. Yet, he could contemplate the relationship between the Almighty and Bnai Yisrael. This understanding enabled Moshe to appeal properly to Hashem and beseech Him for forgiveness for His nation. We now understand that Moshe's vision did not involve any corporeal element. Our Sages are utilizing imagery to communicate an important message regarding Moshe's experience at Sinai.

"And when Moshe came before Hashem to speak with Him, he would remove the covering until he went out. And he would go out and speak to Bnai Yisrael telling them what had been commanded. And the nation saw that the skin of Moshe's face glowed. And Moshe would restore the covering over his face until he came to speak with Him." (Shemot 34:34-35)

Moshe ascended Mount Sinai a final time. On this occasion he achieved a profound understanding of the Almighty and His ways. This knowledge is the most advanced understanding of the Almighty that can be acquired by a human being. The Torah explains that when Moshe descended from the mountain his face glowed. At first, Ahron and the people were afraid to approach Moshe. However, Moshe called to Ahron and Bnai Yisrael to approach him. He then spoke with Ahron, the leaders and the nation. Upon completion of this address, Moshe placed a covering over his face. This covering hid the light that glowed from his face. Our passages explain the role of this covering. Whenever Moshe communicated with the Almighty he removed this covering. Most commentaries maintain that the covering remained removed while Moshe delivered Hashem's message to the people. After Moshe completed his presentation, he restored the covering. Moshe's face remained covered until he next communicated with Hashem.

Gershonides seems to differ on the use of the covering. According to his opinion, the covering was restored as soon as Moshe finished speaking with Hashem. When Moshe spoke with the people, his face was covered. The commentaries offer various interpretations of the glow and th

*Moses' "horns of light"
depicted here in accord with Rashi*



covering. Most understand the Torah's account literally. Moshe's face actually beamed with light. The covering is also understood in the literal sense. However, Gershonides takes a different approach to explaining this narrative. He suggests that neither the beams of light or the covering should be interpreted literally. Instead, they are to be understood figuratively. In order to understand Gershonides' interpretation it is important to remember that he maintains that the covering was only removed during Moshe's communication with Hashem. During his address to Bnai Yisrael, the covering was restored. Gershonides begins by explaining that Moshe achieved the highest possible level of prophecy. He explains that Moshe's prophetic ability developed over time. At Sinai, Hashem revealed to Moshe the most profound truths a human being can grasp. This implies that Sinai represented the full maturation of Moshe as a prophet. He was at the zenith of his prophetic powers.

Moshe's advanced level of prophecy expressed itself in various ways. Maimonides outlines the differences between Moshe and other prophets in his Mishne Torah. One of these differences is that other prophets can only receive prophecy after adequate preparation. The prophet must enter into an appropriate state. In this state the individual sheds all attachment with the material world. An inner peace and calm must also be reached. This is not an easily achieved state. The difficulty of attaining and maintaining this state limits the opportunity of the prophet to receive

prophecy. Moshe could achieve prophecy at any time. He was always in the state requisite for prophecy. He possessed a super-human ability to detach himself from the material world and focus on the Almighty. Gershonides asserts that this distinction can be expressed in an even more basic manner. Other prophets are basically focused on the material world. In order to achieve prophecy, they force themselves to refocus their orientation. Through tremendous effort, they shed their material orientation and focus on the spiritual. In contrast, Moshe ultimately altered his basic orientation. When Moshe descended from Sinai, he was no longer similar to other human beings or prophets. He was completely focused on the spiritual. He was entirely detached from the material world. In other words, Moshe was innately focused on the spiritual.

We can now understand Gershonides' interpretation of Moshe's glow and his covering. Moshe descended from Sinai. He was no longer like other human beings. He was an essentially spiritual being. Ahron and the Bnai Yisrael sensed Moshe's complete detachment from the material world. The "glow" that emanated from Moshe was this super-human spiritual focus. Ahron and the nation reacted with awe. They could not approach Moshe. Neither could Moshe easily communicate with the material world and its inhabitants. This created a problem. Moshe was the Almighty's prophet. His responsibility was to deliver the Divine message to the people. Yet, a barrier now existed between Moshe and the nation. His very perfection, interfered with his relationship with Bnai Yisrael. The people were in awe of Moshe and could not approach him. Moshe, not longer related to the world he was commanded to instruct. In order for Moshe to communicate with the people, he was forced to reenter the material realm. For Moshe, this required an act of will. He was required to suspend some element of his spiritual orientation. This reorientation to the material is described as a covering. The covering symbolizes Moshe hiding his true nature. Moshe hid an element of his spiritual self in order to communicate with the nation. ■

Mesechet Berachot 7a. Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Moreh Nevuchim, volume 1, chapter 5. Divrai HaYamim I, 17:21. Mesechet Berachot 6a. Rabbaynu Shlomo ben Yitzchak (Rashi), Commentary on Sefer Shemot 34:33. Rabbaynu Avraham ibn Ezra, Commentary on Sefer Shemot, 34:33. Rabbaynu Levi ben Gershon (Ralbag / Gershonides), Commentary on Sefer Shemot, (Mosad HaRav Kook, 1994), p 440. See, for example, Rabbaynu Avraham ibn Ezra, Commentary on Sefer Shemot, 34:33. Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Mishne Torah, Hilchot Yesodai HaTorah, chapter 7. Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Mishne Torah, Hilchot Yesodai HaTorah, 7:4-6. Rabbaynu Levi ben Gershon (Ralbag / Gershonides), Commentary on Sefer Shemot, (Mosad HaRav Kook, 1994), p 440.

the curse of the wise comes true

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM
& LEWIS BARBANEL



Exodus 32:32, “And now, lift their sin, and if not, erase me please from Your book that You wrote.” (“Book” referring to the Torah)

Moses says this to God, attempting to obtain a pardon for the Jews’ Golden Calf sin. God responds to Moses, “Those who sinned against Me, I will erase from My book.” Is God disagreeing with Moses? It would appear that He is.

The Elders of Tosafos (Talmudic commentators) said that Moses made a bargain of sorts: “If you forgive me for breaking your tablets, forgive them, for You are not one who is biased in judgment”. God responds: “Whoever sinned against Me will I erase. They caused you to sin Moses, and the sin of the Tablets is theirs (not yours). You acted properly, as they were not fit to receive the Tablets.” Nonetheless, Moses’ name was erased from the entire Parsha of Tetzaveh, for [the name] ‘Moses’ is not found there. This was done because ‘the curse of the wise comes true, even if made on a condition’.”

Of course, we need to understand Moses’ equation between his breaking the Ten Commandments, and the Jews’ Golden Calf sin. But let us address the main idea: “The curse of the wise comes true, even if made on a condition.” Moses cursed himself, in suggesting his name be erased from the Torah if the Jews would not be forgiven. However, God seems to suggest that He will not uphold Moses’ wish of erasure, as he says, “the sin was the Jews’ as they caused you to sin Moses.” Our obvious question is, if that is so, and God says Moses did not sin, why then does God erase Moses name from the Torah, albeit the single Parsha of Tetzaveh?

God says this, “He who sins will I erase”, and God did in fact erase Moses’ name. How do we understand God’s contradictory words: on the one hand He indemnifies Moses, saying the Jews caused him to break the Tablets. On the other hand, He erases Moses’ name from Parshas Tetzaveh! I see only one possible answer: Moses’ name deserved erasure. I do not mean that Moses sinned; there may be another reason why his name must be obscured. I will elaborate shortly. For now, let us line up the questions:

- 1) What is meant by, “The curse of the wise comes true, even if made on a condition”?
- 2) Why was Moses’ name erased from Tetzaveh, as opposed to nay other Parsha?
- 3) Is it due to its coming immediately prior to the Parsha containing the Golden Calf?
- 4) What was Moses’ sin?
- 5) How does erasing his name address the issue?

Hold on to these questions. Let us further investigate our principle.

King David’s Curse

The Talmud cites another case where we apply an almost identical principle, “The curse of the wise comes true, even if made for free.” (Here it is made for “free”, while Moses’ curse was made “conditionally.”) Talmud Makkos 11a records the episode when King David was digging out the Temple’s foundation, the sea threatened to flood the Earth. A metaphor. King David inquired if it was permissible to write God’s name on a chard to be tossed into the sea, so as to contain it. None answered him. He cursed with suffocation, anyone who knew an answer and remained silent. Achitophel then considered that since God’s name may be erased from the Sotah’s document to create marital harmony, certainly it could be erased in this case to save the world, and he instructed the King accordingly. King David did so, and all was saved. Nonetheless, later, when Achitophel saw his counsel to Avshalom was disregarded, he hung himself, dying precisely in line with King David’s curse of suffocation. (Samuel II, 17:23) The Talmud teaches that although Achitophel heeded King David’s threat, nonetheless, Achitophel seemingly died by the very curse of the king. We thereby support, “The curse of the wise comes true, even if made for free.” But what is this justice?

We must be careful. We have a tendency to evaluate a Talmudic portion, or any part of Torah, based on the first notion that pops up. We may think that King David possessed the ability to curse. After all, he was a king, and it appears on face value that his “curse” came true. But this is a superficial and false view of a curse, which is merely the opposite of a blessing. No man has the ability to alter nature or someone else’s free will or fate, merely by uttering words, as with a curse or a blessing. It is the ignorant reading of stories like these, which spreads fallacy.

Let us approach this Talmudic portion, as would a scholar. King David was human. He possessed no greater capabilities than any other person. So how may I understand that his “curse came true”? Look at all the facts in the story...one stands out. Achitophel did not readily assist the king, not until King David made a threat. Why would Achitophel remain silent at first? It must be based on some

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reluctance to assist the king. We see later on as well, Achitophel counseled Avshalom, King David's son, on how to successfully rebel against his father the king. A picture begins to emerge...Achitophel harbored some animosity towards King David, and this explains why he counseled the King's son on how to succeed over King David. David's need to threaten Achitophel shows Achitophel in the same light – displaying Achitophel's animosity in the form of silence.

So let us explain the phenomenon: King David has no powers, yet Achitophel does in fact die the way the King cursed. How did this happen? The answer is, "observation." What do I mean? King David "observed" a negative trait in Achitophel. His "curse" that anyone who withholds information die, means that the king was pointing out that Achitophel possessed some negative trait, deserving of punishment. Again, all King David did, was "observed and identified a flaw" – what we mean by a "curse". But the king's words cannot cause Achitophel's death. We even see that Achitophel hung himself! It was not David! So why does the Talmud attribute it to King David? The Talmud is merely agreeing with the king. When it says, "The curse of the wise comes true, even if made for free" it teaches that when the "wise" say something, they are observing reality accurately. This is why the Talmudic principle only applies to the "wise". What they say – be it a curse or a blessing – is in fact an accurate observation, but it is not causative. Thus, King David observed that Achitophel possessed a flaw, which he knew would cause him his own downfall. King David did not 'cause' Achitophel's death; Achitophel hung himself. But his death is euphemistically ascribed to the king, as if to say the king was right.

King David said whomever remains "silent" will suffocate. Why suffocation"? It makes sense. Achitophel sinned by his mouth (throat) and King David knew that this type of life must cause his downfall. King David knew that a counselor (Achitophel) whose tools are his throat and mouth, and who is also deviant, would eventually, when using his mouth, suffer by it. (Anyone who is deviant who also functions in a specific capacity the majority of the time, will find his end connected with that function.) King David may have assumed that Achitophel was too wise not to know this himself, and upon his own self-realization that he erred with his mouth, would kill himself in connection with it through hanging himself. Perhaps Achitophel suffered from a certain amount of guilt regarding using his counseling abilities for evil, to destroy King David. Perhaps his animosity towards the king was because of his role as king – a coveted position to say the least. Radak states that Achitophel hung himself because he knew

Avshalom would not succeed without his advice. Thereby, the king would discover Achitophel as a rebel, and would seek to kill him. Achitophel therefore saw the writing on the wall and preempted the king's decree. We conclude that King David's curse was merely an observation of what was probably inevitable. He knew that Achitophel's deviance used in counseling would bring him to his death. There is no causal relationship between man's words, and reality.

Moses' Curse

Now, how does this apply to our case of Moses and the Jews? Moses too cannot cause a change in nature or people, simply by uttering words. God alone controls the very natural laws exclusively under His guidance. God's laws were fixed before Moses or any prophet entered the world's stage, so how can they change what God already completed? They cannot! However, we are forced to reconcile God's statement that the Jews sinned, and the fact that God did in fact erase Moses' name, which appears to be a fulfillment of "Whomever sinned against Me I will erase." Moses' name required erasure...but why?

In Exodus 32:1, the people first demand to create a god (Golden Calf), as "Moses the man" who took us out of Egypt is gone. Moses...the "MAN"? Why the extra word? Of course he is a "man". But the Torah is offering a spotlight on the issue...and a direction to the answer. The Torah is pointing out the precise flaw: the people were overly attached to Moses, the "man". What does this mean? Look at what they did: they created a very physical, Golden Calf. Meaning, they became so attached to Moses' presence, they could not tolerate his absence for even a few hours longer than his scheduled descent from Sinai. They panicked, and immediately desired some physical icon to act as their head.

Perhaps Moses felt in some way, that he contributed to their Golden Calf sin. Perhaps he was not clear on his words about his return; or maybe something else led them to such an act. We even learn that it was through Moses' prayer – a change in himself – that God pardoned the Jews. Meaning, the fate of the Jews was bound to Moses' level of perfection. Evidently, Moses too realized his flaw. He asked specifically to be "erased", because he did not wish his flaw to act as a stumbling block for future generations. A righteous person, concerned with the welfare of future generations may use this logic so that his sins are not recorded. This explains Moses' specific request of "erasure". God replies, "Whomever sinned against Me, will I erase." It would seem that God agrees; Moses name had to be erased. God complied and erased Moses' name in one Parsha.

There may be another understanding. Perhaps

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Weekly Parsha

the dialogue went as follows: "God, if you do not forgive the Jews, please erase my name so I do not act as a stumbling block to future generations." God replies, "Moses, I do not erase someone simply because they wish to shield others. That is not why I will erase someone. I erase someone who 'sins against Me'. It is for this type of sin alone that I erase someone."

Why Erasure?

Now that God erased Moses' name, we are taught that Moses sinned "against God" somehow. But a "sin" here does not mean a violation of some law, but that Moses – without guilt – was somehow connected to an error of the people. God said, "The people caused you to break the Tablets". God thereby indemnified Moses of breaking the Tablets, but not of some other matter. If we are careful with our reading, we do see that God adds two unnecessary words..."whomever sins AGAINST ME..." This teaches an entirely new idea: God will erase someone who not only sins, but sins "against Him". Perhaps this means that if a man becomes too central, he is sinning against God...he "obscures God". We see the people had an attachment to Moses, to the point, that they could not tolerate his absence for a few hours. And God's response is perfect: He obscured Moses. When God says "I will erase he who sins against Me", God means to say that He will remove from the Torah, that person who sins against God, he being one whose actions counter the focus of God. Perhaps, Moses somehow obscured the Jews' focus from God, onto himself. It seems this is so, as they could not be without Moses for too long. But this does not mean it was the fault of Moses. God's use of the word "sin" may simply indicate Moses' somehow contributed to a negative state in the Jews.

We can resolve the contradiction found in the Elders of Tosafos: God indemnifies Moses of the Golden Calf sin. Yet, God erases Moses' name from one section, teaching that he somehow obscured God from the focus of the Jews, and therefore, the only remedy is to obscure Moses, allowing God to reemerge in full view. This explains God's description of Moses as he who "sins against Me". But I do not mean a violation deserving of any punishment. Thus, Moses own self-curse took hold, as he was correct that one who "sins" must in some way not harm future generations. So inasmuch as God erased Moses' name, He shielded future generations, as was Moses' wish. So Moses' curse, "even for free" (he really did not sin with the Calf) still took hold, and he was erased.

He too, just like King David, observed a flaw, albeit in himself, but he did not bring anything upon himself through mere words. It is important



that one understands clearly from these two accounts that man possesses no ability to curse or bless in the commonly misunderstood sense. Man's true curses and blessings are mere observations about negatives or positives in others, respectively. When man curses someone, he is simply defining a negative trait, but his words cannot effectuate any change in reality. What a wise man does when he curses, and this is only an act of a wise man, is to unveil a poor character trait in another person. Perhaps the person will desire to abandon this flawed character. Similarly, when someone blesses another, all he is doing is describing a positive, which causes the person to cleave stronger to that positive trait.

We learn that God's will is that man is not elevated above Him. Many Jewish communities today make such a fuss over Rebbes and their blessings. Certainly we have proved that man has no powers. But from our study in this area, it would appear that overindulgence in man, any man...even Moses, obscures our focus on God and must be avoided as well. Nothing may steal man's attention away from God. This theory also explains why King David could not build the Temple: his popularity due to numerous, military victories would overshadow the Temple's status as "God's" Temple. There was nothing wrong with his bloodied hands, as he fought on behalf of God's fame, not his own. But when the people exalted him for his "tens of thousands", they bestowed fame upon King David, and this threatened to steal the focus away from God. This could not be tolerated. God gave the Temple's construction to King David's son...not as a penalty, but actually a deferred recognition of King David's zeal.

Our last question: Why did God erase Moses name from Tetzaveh, as opposed to any other Parsha? Write in with your suggestions. Good Shabbos to all. ■

Can God Do Anything ?



RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

I recently joined a friend for a meal, and our discussion coursed down the road of God's abilities. "God can do anything" my friend commented. I think to myself, "This sentiment smacks of an blind 'loyalty' to God. Isn't that a good thing? Definitely not, I answer myself: loyalty must not conquer reason. Of course this alarms some people, as they were raised to believe in this Superman view of God." I concluded my mental note.

"God can make a rock He cannot lift", my friend added. I thought to myself, "He is making a stretch, quoting that all-too-infamous philosophy. He is merely parroting what his parents, friends, and unfortunately, teachers taught him."

Clearly, our Jewish community is not trained in the fundamental of all fundamentals: "thinking". Judaism has become religion of rote activities, when in fact; it contains absolutely provable, enjoyable and illuminating truths. But the road to true Judaism is not passivity, parroting, or parading for the applause of others. Unfortunately, schools continue this mission, to make kids swallow and regurgitate with such an admirable capacity to impress others. They are thereby taught to live for accolades, instead of truth. But what good is memory, if all which one memorizes

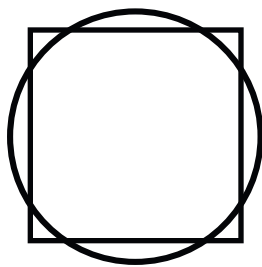
makes no sense, does not make him or her appreciate Judaism any deeper, or actually becomes a pain, as is true in many cases? I don't blame kids who hate school. Who could enjoy piling up facts that mean nothing? And the end doesn't even justify the means: they get straight As, impress their parents, get into fine colleges, attaining great positions, earn tons of money, work 60 hour work weeks...while Judaism takes a back seat to this blindly accepted value system. "It is a good to die rich." This is today's lethal ethic.

Maimonides actually coined this term I borrow, "fundamental of all fundamentals" in connection with the foremost concept: God exists. He is the "First Cause". By definition, the First Cause teaches that all else is His creation. What then follows from this truth is that this universe, His creation, functions in a set manner. It does not deviate from reasonable laws, and these laws conform to our own, human reasoning. That being said – Judaism, another of God's creations – also follows the same blueprint of reason. The road to Judaic truths can only be reason, because Judaism's Designer is the creator of "reason."

Understanding this fundamental, that Judaism is a completely rational system, and that God does not deviate from what is

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Impossibilities clearly refute the notion that God "can do anything": He cannot make black be white at the same time, or a create a square circle:



reasonable, true and proven, we may address my friend's philosophy:

Maimonides' 13 Principles teach that these are absolutes – the very definition of a "principle". Maimonides was of the conviction that these 13 Principles, such as God's non-physical nature, and His reward and punishment system, are absolutes. This means that God CANNOT do anything, such as in making Himself physical, or withholding reward or punishment from those deserving. My friend, who feels God can do all, would posit that God could also kill Himself: a natural absurdity, which follows his folly. One quickly realizes that God cannot do anything. But this limit on His nature is not a "negative". We once gave the example of a judge who could not – regardless of how hard he tried – rule unjustly. In every one of his cases, he found the innocent person innocent, and the guilty person, guilty. Would we say that his inability to make an error is a negative? Would we say this limitation is a "lack" in his perfection? No. Just the opposite: his inability to cause evil and rule unjustly is precisely his perfection. Well, the same applies to God. God has the inability to do injustice, to err, to be ignorant, to kill Himself, and He cannot make a rock He cannot lift. Reason demands this, and the world operates by reason. We are trapped. However...being trapped in reason is a "good"!

Reason must dictate how we live, and what we accept as truth. For truth refers to what is real - that which God made. His works cannot deviate from reason: "The Rock, His works are perfect, for all His ways are just; a trustworthy God and no crookedness, righteous and upright is He." (Deut. 32:4) Here, God equates that which is "perfect", to "justice". His "works" including the universe, are perfect, and therefore, creation is just. What does this mean? How can creation be "just"? Ibn Ezra explains, "His works are perfect for all His ways are just" means that the perfection of His works "creation" – lies in the wisdom embedded in them. Ibn Ezra says, "The works of God are in accord with wisdom."

We conclude: creation and all we see follow God's wisdom. God follows a wise method of creation, existence, and abiding with mankind. When we attempt to truly understand God, we too must follow a wise course of thought. And we have shown that wisdom demands certain truths, which limit God from what is not wise or just. God is limited. This is His perfection.

But even with sound arguments, my friend

might still be reluctant. Why? There exists in man the fear of change, and the inability at times to overstep his own, self-inflicted boundaries. He fears even to entertain an alternate idea...perhaps, because so much of his life will be proven to be a waste by adopting a new outlook, thereby exposing his prior opinions as false. But what is preferable: to continue lying to oneself so as to remain with a pristine view of the past, or to admit many years were wasted while salvaging the remaining years? What should schools do: continue training children to memorize, instead of thinking? Reason answers these questions.

I urge you: if you do not wish your child to end up with the incoherent philosophy expressed by my friend, request that your children's schools and yeshivas institute regular classes on Judaism's Fundamentals. Parsha, Tanach, and Talmud are essential, but they must be guided by the more primary ideas. Memorizing a Rashi, chapters of Mishna, learning a Parsha, or passing a Jewish history test with a 100 makes little difference, if a student has a false concept of God. I suggest topics be taught, such as Maimonides' 13 Principles, areas of God's justice, reward and punishment, and most certainly, an elaboration on Maimonides Yesodei HaTorah, "Judaism's Fundamentals" found in the very beginning of his Mishneh Torah, for good reason. Here, Maimonides teaches the essentials regarding our knowledge of God. These all take time, and must be taught only when the student is ready for them. But even at young ages, children can be introduced slowly to what they can understand. We can distill essential ideas from these areas, and reword them even for younger children to grasp.

Over a few years, once a student has comprehended these fundamental areas, he will be more committed to his or her Judaism, as he sees a rational system. He has a clearer picture of Torah's distinguishing characteristics. No less important, much attention must be paid to a student's critical thinking, developed by rigorous, Talmudic study. Developing the ability to analyze matters for himself, he may answer questions independently, thereby encouraged to delve deeper, as he sees he can discover greater insights. With this approach, students will become independent thinkers, a benefit, which spills over into all areas of life. But more importantly, they will know what Judaism is.

Judaism is not the religion which thinks God can make immovable objects. ■

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

News: Now on sale as a downloadable PDF book:
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Good & Bad

DOUG TAYLOR AND RABBI MORTON MOSKOWITZ

"You probably have something really wizardly to say about all of this," I challenged, not hiding my sarcasm very well.

I was in a foul mood. Running into my friend, the King of Rational Thought, while waiting for a table at a neighborhood restaurant had cheered me for a split second. But once I related to him everything that had happened to me in the last five hours, my sullen grey outlook returned.

It started when the kitchen sink backed up before I'd even gotten dressed for work. Resorting to a plumber's helper, I inadvertently popped the drain fitting below the sink, causing a cascade of water to run down the inside of the wall.

I finished cleaning up that mess only to discover that my hot water tank had broken, turning a corner of my basement into a lake. Later that morning, one of my biggest clients postponed a large project. But the capper was the call from the IRS about a possible audit.

When I finished the story, the King of Rational Thought asked me the strangest question.

"You haven't died yet, have you?"

I stared at him. He'd either tuned out my tale of woe, or he'd flipped. The latter seemed more likely.

"Huh?" I said. "What?"

"You're still alive, right?"

"Seems like it. Why?" This was not improving my mood. I wanted sympathy, and I wasn't getting it.

"Have you considered the fact that you can't call these events good or bad until you're dead?"

"Well now that seems brilliant," I said irritably. "It's kind of hard to call it once you're dead."

"True," said my friend, "but here's the point. You can't know whether something is good or bad until your life is over. Look, I'll give you an example. Once there was a farmer who had a horse he used to plow his field. One day, the horse ran away. The townspeople came around and said, 'Oh, that's too bad. What terrible misfortune.' But the farmer replied, 'Maybe it's bad, and maybe it's not. It's hard to say.'

"Three days later, the horse came trotting back into the barn leading five wild mares. 'What good fortune!' the townspeople said. But the farmer replied, 'Good, bad, it's hard to say.'

"Two days later, the man's son was thrown while trying to break one of the wild mares, and he fractured his leg. 'What bad luck,' said the townspeople. But the farmer just replied, 'Good, bad, it's hard to say.'

"A week later, the army came through the town, conscripting all the young men to go off to war. But they left the farmer's son because his leg was broken."

The King of Rational Thought looked me squarely in the eye. "Good, bad, it's hard to say," he said.

I didn't know how to reply.

"Do you ever play pinochle?" he asked.

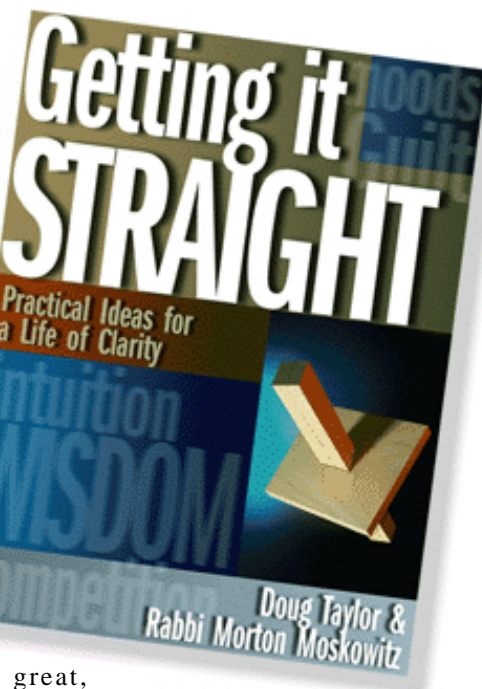
Pinochle? My head spun as I tried to shift gears.

"Yes," I said, not having the foggiest idea where this was going.

"Have you ever been dealt a hand that looked lousy, but you ended up winning?"

"Yes." A faint glow appeared at the end of the tunnel.

"Have you ever been dealt a hand that looked



great,
but you ended up losing?"

"Yes." The light in the tunnel got brighter.

"Now do you understand what I mean? You can't tell whether a situation is good or bad until the hand has been completely played. In life," he concluded, "that means when your life is over."

"By the way," he added, "do you also know that once the pinochle cards are dealt, it's a complete waste of time, energy, and emotion to wish they were different?"

My friend's guests arrived just as the maitre d' appeared to take us to our respective tables, and we parted. Once seated, I stared out at the ferry reviewing the ideas I'd just heard. He was right. There didn't seem to be much point in ruining my whole day over events that were outside my control. As the sun broke through my emotional storm clouds, I decided to encourage myself even further.

I skipped lunch and ordered dessert. ■

WHAT EVER HAPPENED TO THE MISHKAN?



Reader: The Tabernacle of the Congregation, as we gather from the descriptions in Scripture, was a mobile sanctuary, constructed of gilded boards and covered by curtains. Scripture tells us that the Tabernacle accompanied the children of Israel throughout their wanderings in the wilderness until their arrival in the land of Canaan. Gilgal, in the plains of Jericho, was the last station in their wanderings, their first in an inhabited land. It was there that the Tabernacle remained throughout the period of the conquest of Canaan. (Josh. IV; Zeb. 118, and parallel passages).

According to tradition, the Tabernacle was erected on the first day of Nissan, in the year of Creation 2449, about 3,300 years ago. It served as the centre of Divine worship for the children of Israel for a period of about 500 years. It accompanied them during their wanderings in the desert and after they had taken possession of the land of Canaan, it served as their spiritual centre until the erection of the First Temple by Solomon. It stood for 14 years in Gilgal, for 369 years in Shilo, and for 57 years in Nob and Gibeon. After the First Temple was built, we are told by our Sages, the Tabernacle was dismantled, and its ancient curtains and other appurtenances were hidden away in subterranean passages underneath the Holy Shrine. (Sotah 9a). (Taken from "The Tabernacle" by Moshe Levine)

The above two paragraphs answer the question of "What Ever Happened to the Mishkan?" But it also adds to the frustration of finding proofs of ancient Bible stories. Wouldn't it be comforting and assuring, that our election to live a Torah way of life, can be supported by the viewing of the actual

elements of the Mishkan? How about seeing what is hidden in the Vatican? Shouldn't there be a statute of limitations on "Spoils of war"? After all, it's almost 2000 years since the Romans pillaged the second temple! Can the U.N. be petitioned to persuade Rome to reveal to the world what they have hidden? Many questioning Jews, who weren't indoctrinated with Torah concepts and truths, from birth, are weaker in their beliefs. Especially the last two generations who witnessed the tragedies in Europe and now in Israel.

Is it wrong to want proofs? Will these generations, and future generations still achieve acceptance into the next world, while carrying these sacks of doubts? - Chaim

Mesora: One not indoctrinated from youth may still achieve complete conviction in Torah truths. He also need not rely on tangible evidence of the Jews' journeys, or of their Tabernacle. Intelligence applied to the study of the universe and Torah will yield absolute proof of God, His commands, and thus, His will for the Jewish people and mankind. Greater than the Tabernacle, is our universe. "God's glory fills the entire earth" as well. Thus far, we have proof of a Creator. What about his will for us?

In terms of knowing that one has led a proper lifestyle, even without having seen the Temple or Tabernacle, transmission from Sinai is our proof. If we know Sinai occurred without having visuals, we thereby know all other accounts occurred, which are also contained in that same transmission, including the Tabernacle.

What ever happened to the Tabernacle has no affect on what we know must be true based on reason. ▣