



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

*King David, Psalm 81*

ESTD  
1997

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

# JewishTimes

Volume I, No. 16...May 24, 2002

WWW.MESORA.ORG/JEWISHTIMES.PDF

Download and Print Free

## IN THIS ISSUE:

PRAYING FOR OTHERS	1, 2
ADAM'S LONGEVITY	1, 3
WHO IS HAPPY?	1
IS THE BRAIN, THE SOUL?	2
DOES GOD CREATE EVIL?	3

## SUGGESTED READINGS:

SEE THESE AND OTHER ARTICLES AT OUR SITE

### Maimonides' 13 PRINCIPLES

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

### God's Existence Belief or Proof?

[www.mesora.org/belieforproof.html](http://www.mesora.org/belieforproof.html)

### God's Land Without God?

AN OPEN LETTER TO THE JEWISH COMMUNITY:  
[www.mesora.org/openletter/openletter2.html](http://www.mesora.org/openletter/openletter2.html)

## Praying for Others

**RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM**

**Reader:** Dear Mesora, I once heard (unsure of the original source) that if one prays for another person suffering the same ailment or having the same desire (example: wanting children) as oneself, then the person will be granted by Hashem the very thing they asked for the another person. 1. Have you ever heard of such a notion (its source)? 2. If not, what do you think about this? I have some problems with it as it doesn't make sense to me that Hashem should decide to give you something you want should you daven for another with the same bakasha.

I would appreciate your insight into this, as I was asked to do this (and

*(continued on page 2)*

## Adam's Longevity

**RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM**

Since youth we have read stories from Genesis, sometimes with much amazement. Of the personalities mentioned in Genesis what is striking is their longevity. Adam lived to the age of 930, and others lived until 1000 years. Currently, most of us do not exceed 100 years of age, so 1000 years seems unreal. These ages were real, however there are discussions among our Rabbis as to who lived that long aside from those named.

The Ramban's argument against the Maimonides, recorded by the Ramban in Genesis 5:4. The Ramban's reason for Adam's longevity is due to his being the "Handiwork of the Holy One". He was created in "absolute perfection as regards beauty, strength and might." The Ramban explains that because of man's sin and environmental changes after the flood and the dispersion, did man's lifespan decrease. The Ramban holds that all of mankind shared this longevity, and all mankind suffered a shorter lifespan.

The Ramban criticizes The Maimonides' opinion:

"Now what the Rabbi has written in the Moreh Nevuchim does not seem right to me, namely that the longevity was only in those individuals mentioned, while the rest of the people in those generations lived lives of ordinary natural length. He further said this exception was due to the mode of living and food of such people or by way of miracle. But these words are without substance. Why should this miracle happen to them since they were neither prophets nor righteous, nor worthy that a miracle be done for them, especially for generation after generation. And how could a proper mode of living and proper food prolong their years to the extent that they are so many times greater than that of the entire generation? It is possible that there were others who observed such a mode of living, in which case all or most of them should

*(continued on page 3)*



## ASK YOUR CHILDREN:

"If God wants us to be happy, and gave the Torah, what is God's idea of happiness?"  
Have your children email us with their answers: [questions@mesora.org](mailto:questions@mesora.org)

## Who is Happy?

**RIVKA OLENICK**

Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch states in Horeb: "It is not how little or how much you have that makes you small or great but how little or how great you are with what you have." This concept is very difficult to put into practice, especially when we desire to possess what our neighbors have. We often measure our own happiness in life by looking at what we don't have. Does it really matter if our neighbor has a bigger house or better car or more things to fill their house or anything else for that matter? Bigger and better just means more responsibility and worry - and it is all temporary "false" happiness, not long lasting "real" happiness. The minute we see our neighbor with something that we think we must have, then what we already possess seems empty. It's what we desire and don't have that appears so much more attractive. Everything you don't have you want and whatever you do have seems unattractive. So the cycle continues and the fantasies fuel the cycle. The more time and energy a person spends in acquiring possessions the more unhappy a person becomes, because there is no real value in pursuing "possessions." The only thing we acquire from endless "possessions" is endless responsibility. And the responsibility does become endless and futile and takes a person away from their real purpose in life, the purpose that truly makes a person happy.

We've all heard people say they feel unhappy because they want but don't have what others have - and yet what they do have, they take for granted. "If I only had more money, I know I'd really be happy!" Everything that one already has that made one happy originally, was given by God - so why unhappiness now? Hasn't God provided you with everything you need, and each time you obtained a new thing you were happy? Now you are unhappy and so you blame God! The Ramban says: "The numerous evils to which individual persons are exposed are due to the defects existing in the persons themselves. We complain and seek relief from our own faults; we suffer from the evils which we by our own free will, inflict on ourselves, and then ascribe them to God, who is far from being connected to them!" (Guide for the Perplexed, Chapter XII pg. 267).

God set up the world so that we all can be happy by doing the good, the good is the real happiness not the pleasures that we imagine is real happiness. How does a person continue on the way to a happier life? By involving oneself in Torah study, learning about and doing good deeds, and directing one's life towards the middle path. Happiness in doing good begins when a person spends as much time as possible thinking and learning. Acquiring ideas and wisdom that can be passed on to one's family and friends. This real "acquisition" and investment in life is what gives a person strength and contentment to continue in the right direction. A person will feel satisfied that they are spending their time acquiring "thought." After a while you will see that redirecting your life this way gives you more peace of mind and less worry. You will want to continue in this derech, this way. You'll want to share your thoughts and ideas with your family and neighbor/friends and you may influence them to be introspective about their own life. This is all positive and part of the purpose of the commandment to "Love your neighbor as yourself." All the good that your new direction brings, you will want for your neighbor too. This is what creates peace between people and pulls us away from the evils of envy and jealousy, which began in the first place because you wanted and thought you needed to have what your neighbor has. "Who is happy? One who is happy with their lot." Psalms 119:99

# Praying for Others

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

(continued from page 1)

am very tempted to do it myself) but do not want to err philosophically. Thank you.

**Mesora:** You are quoting a Rashi in Beraishis; 21:1, and a gemara in Baba Kama 92a. It states that if one prays for another person (to have children) while he needs that himself, he is answered (by G-d) first.

It occurred to me after writing my response below, that this area can serve as a good example in general of teaching the method for discovering answers to one's questions.

In this example, one who prays for another is entitled to an answer more readily than if he prays for himself. That is the unique fact displayed by this statement of the Rabbis. Whenever defining an area, one must determine what is unique about the specific area at hand. Therefore, the way to approach this problem is to first hone in on the specific trait displayed by the one praying. One may then ask the following to direct himself towards where the answer lies: "What is it in one's praying for others which entitles him to be answered?" Asking this question more precisely, one may ask, "What perfection exists in a person when he is less personal in prayer?" I say "perfection" as G-d responds more readily to one more perfected, and I say "less personal" since he prays for another person's needs before his own. The answer now stares us in the face: When one is less personal, in other words, "objective" about the needs of people, even before his own needs, he displays that which G-d desires, i.e., an objective embrace of the ideas of the Torah per se, as opposed to reacting to his own personal needs. G-d answers him because he is attached to the truth, and not attached to what is important only for himself.

To answer the question more fully, when one has a need, but prays for another person first, he is relating to the need objectively and not out of a personal desire. One can either pray for children to satisfy a personal longing, or she can pray for children with an objective perspective, viewing having children as a proper involvement in as much as it is G-d's will. The latter being the proper outlook. She demonstrates that she is not personally attached to that need, and views the desired good as something which she feels no more worthy to have, than someone else with the very same need.

As her request for others follows an objective and more realistic view of the Torah's ideals, G-d takes note, and responds to her first.

This is what is meant that she will be answered by G-d before the other person. G-d responding to her first demonstrates that her request was more appropriate. This does not mean that the other person's request was improper and will go unanswered. All the Rabbis intended to illustrate with this statement was the perfection found in one who prays for another before herself.

We see that when Channa prayed for a child to devote him to the temple under Eli's tutelage, she was responded to by G-d, and she bore Samuel the prophet. She too desired a child for the true purpose.

Perhaps G-d withheld children from all of the matriarchs as a method for perfecting their attachment to their children. As the Rabbis teach, "G-d withheld their children as G-d desires the prayers of the righteous." G-d desired the Jewish nation have leaders who were of the utmost perfection. It could very well be that G-d's will was that the means by which one becomes perfected has much to do with the relationship their parents have with them. As G-d withheld children from Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel and Leah, these mothers then introspected, discovering what ways to perfect themselves, and perhaps saw an unfit attachment to having children. They observed this and perfected themselves, and were then granted children. As they raised these children, the forefathers of the Jewish nation, these children were raised with such objectivity from their perfected parents, being given the proper foundation from youth which G-d deemed essential to their characters.

It should be noted however that this is not a game, that is, one cannot expect to be answered first if he or she is really praying for another with his own selfish motives in the back of his mind. It is only the true, honest, objective prayer for another which raises one to the level in which G-d admires his objectivity, and that G-d will in fact answer his prayer first.

Again, our eyes are opened to the wisdom of Chazal only by using our minds to unravel their secrets. As King Solomon stated at the commencement of Proverbs, one purpose in writing that book was to impart to us the understanding for solving the riddles of the Rabbis. Taking the sayings of the Rabbis literally or blindly, is a practice observed by too many. The Rabbis intended to disclose ideas to those of us who desire the truth, and seek it out

through deep study, not casual reading. As King Solomon wrote, "if you seek it (Torah) as silver, and search it out as a buried treasure, then you will understand the fear of God, and the knowledge of God will you find". Learning then, is an intense endeavor, involving exertion, and not simplistic and superficial page turning. These are King Solomon's words.

The ideas of the Rabbis will not be discovered without vigor, patience, intelligence, and humility. □

## Is the Brain, the Soul?

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

**Reader:** I know that we must believe in the World to Come - that after death we will be resurrected in a future state of THIS world.

**Mesora:** This is disputed: Nachmanides holds the next world is here on Earth. Maimonides holds it is a non-physical state of being.

**Reader:** Yet is the concept of the "soul" as a independent mind, a fundamental principle of the Torah? Is this included in Maimonides' 13 principles, the literature of the Rishonim or any of our primary sacred texts?

**Mesora:** This concept is not one of the thirteen principles per se. But we have two areas of proof: 1) Scripture, 2) Reason.

Scripture states, Gen. 1:27, "...in the form of God he created them (man)..."

God is not physical, as all matter requires creation, and God cannot be created. Understand, He cannot be controlled by laws of creation which He designed! The Governor cannot also be the governed. Before anything existed, and matter had yet to be created, there was God alone - Who performed all of creation. By definition, everything must have been created by That which Itself was not - is not - physical matter. God not being physical, and God then saying that man was created in God's form, means that man shares some non-physical element. This is not the fleshy brain, but the metaphysical soul.

Reason also leads us to the conclusion that man must have a non-physical element: Can a rock, a plant, an animal compute  $2+2=4$ ? Can they formulate ideas of justice? No, they cannot, because they all lack a faculty of intelligence. Intelligence emanates from the same "substance" as that which it perceives, I mean, it is metaphysical, as is all knowledge. You cannot point to an idea, as it takes up no space, it weighs nothing, and it cannot be seen. An idea is not physical. Laws are equally non-physical. All we see are the effects of

natural laws, not the laws themselves: One cannot see the ruling law of gravity, but only objects in motion. Gravity as an example, is a law. Where are these laws and these ideas? Nowhere. Really. They exist, but not in a physical or geographical plane. They have no place, no color, no physical attributes whatsoever. Just as math, science and all laws are not physical in substance, but are metaphysical, anything which apprehends these laws must be of the same nature. This is why plants, animals and raw elements cannot "perceive". These objects are composed of earthly materials with no additional metaphysical elements. Man alone perceives. Man alone apprehends the Creator. Man alone has a substance on par with the Creator: The metaphysical soul.

Other beings with brains - bereft of intelligence - proves that brain does not equal soul. Some may argue, "look how smart that dolphin is, or how clever that monkey is". You must understand that these are all projections. We assume if these beasts copy us, they partake of some level of intelligence. But they do not. They are simply functioning out of a programmed set of emotions, just like a computer. Yes, they have emotions, but emotions too, do not equal intelligence. Some animals are designed to mimic, this is for some purpose of the continuation of their species, as is the reason for all elements in their natures. But do not let the parrots and the monkeys - who copy our speech and our actions - lead you to believe they understand. They merely do this out of a conditioning of their emotions, like Pavlov's dog. Once they emotionally associate food with ringing a bell, or mimicking us, it only seems they "know" how to accomplish. But they are merely reacting to an emotion which is purely animal.

**Reader:** Some philosophers and scientists believe that our minds are identical with our brains, i.e. brain-identity theory etc. Can one accept this within the confines of Judaism, and reject the notion of a heavenly abode where we exist as some sort of disembodied consciousness? Thanks, and have a good Shavuot.

**Mesora:** You mix two issues; 1) Whether belief that the brain is the soul is within the confines of Jewish principles, 2) Man's existence in a metaphysical state subsequent to death. I have addressed the former. Regarding the latter, see my every first response above, and research both authorities quoted. You will see this is a fundamental principle, it is true, and it forms a part of Maimonides' 13 Principles. It is discussed in Talmud Sanhedrin, the beginning of chapter eleven. □

Page 2



## Adam's Longevity

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

(continued from page 1)

have attained similar longevity. And how did it happen that enough of the wisdom concerning this good mode of living did not come down to just one of all the sons of Noah after the flood (to enable him to match the longevity of his ancestors), for there was among them a little wisdom of their ancestors even though it steadily decreased from generation to generation?"

The Rabbis stated, "The purpose of learning is *svara* (definition)." Man finds his ultimate goal in study when he "defines" what he perceives as the complete uniqueness of a given phenomena, law or any area of knowledge. That perception of a "new" previously not encountered phenomena means we perceived something "new" and are closer to our understanding of God's wisdom.

Studying the wisdom of the universe was central to Adam's purpose and longevity. Longevity represents the amount of knowledge available to man. Man can live to 1000 years and barely scratch the surface. Perhaps this is one of the reasons man initially was blessed with such long life. To partake in the essence of study, one defines the area at hand by seeking out "*svara*" in the opinion of the Maimonides and Ramban. Maimonides held that only those people mentioned in Scripture enjoyed longevity. The Ramban held all men sustained such duration of life. My understanding of the verses leads me to an additional reason for man's longevity, in accordance with Maimonides' theory that only those men mentioned actually lived that long.

The verses describing the lives of Adam and about ten of his direct descendants repeatedly follow 3 verses focusing on a singular idea. An example is this verse series found in Genesis 5:6-8: 5:6 And Seth (Adam's son) lived 105 years and bore Enosh. 5:7 And Seth lived after having bore Enosh 807 years and he bore sons and daughters. 5:8 And all the days of Enosh were 912 years and he died. (This verse series repeats for about ten more men, only their age changes with their first son's birth and their total years lived.)

In this example, it is Seth's life that is mentioned due to his involvement in procreation. We read of Seth's age at the birth of his first son, and his years during his many offspring, and finally his age at his death. What is the significance of mentioning the first child, and that it is male? I believe it teaches us that Seth desired offspring and so he procreated. The first child mentioned teaches that Seth's participation in procreation establishes the world. A male child was considered a milestone. Since the male controls life it's significant that it be mentioned. Without

male participation in intercourse, there are no offspring. In the second verse with connection to Seth, he lived many years and had many offspring. Perhaps teaching the connection between lifespan and procreation. As procreation is God's will, Seth and others are granted longevity.

This theory would answer Ramban's critique of Maimonides: Maimonides thus holds that this miracle of longevity was not bestowed based on man's particular merits. Rather, God grants long life as He desires world population, and these men procreated. Procreation was their focus and we do not read about anything else in connection with the men listed here. According to Maimonides, all other members of mankind not mentioned during the beginning generations lived until 70 or 80 years.

An interesting insight into miracles is derived. Maimonides holds that God performs miracles to achieve a 'desired goal'. Although certain members of mankind benefited from this miracle of longevity, Maimonides holds that personal perfection is not necessarily a consideration when God renders miracles. What determined longevity was procreation. Ramban disagrees and says only perfected people could benefit from God's miracles. Therefore, the Ramban holds that mankind to have this longevity is due only to design. (Rashi says that initially man had 2 wives, one for procreation and one for sexual intercourse.) This teaches us that there were two distinct institutions then. Man could have selected both or one. This might corroborate Maimonides' theory that not all men merited longevity unless they selected procreation.

It was discussed that longevity contributed to man's self aggrandizement which ultimately drove him to sin against others through robbery and sexual promiscuity. By removing factors contributing to man's downfall is God's way of assisting man. Man's lifespan was decreased by God to assist man by removing man's focus on himself. His energies could be redirected towards the world of wisdom.

In summary, longevity was initially a blessing given to those who according to Maimonides procreated and according to the Ramban, those who were perfected. This also teaches that man can engage and content himself in study for many years. Since the knowledge available to man is endless even if he lived 1000 years. ■

## Does God Create EVIL?

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

**Reader:** I need some help understanding Rambam's analysis of Isa. 45:7. ("Guide for the Perplexed," Chapter 10, Pages 265-267,

Dover Publications.) Is Rambam saying that since G-d can only create good that evil exists only because of His creation of good as an opposite? Thus, G-d can only be attributed as the Creator of evil in an indirect way? Since all of G-d's creations are only positive in form, and evil is a negative, then evil can come about only because of the absence of good? Sort of rambling, but I think you may get my understanding of the subject or lack of? Shalom.

**Mesora:** When we hear such questions, we sometimes feel qualified to offer our opinion. But without consulting God's knowledge graciously revealed through the Torah's words, we most assuredly miss the mark. It is crucial that our knowledge be formed and continuously guided by reason. This is the purpose of both the content and structure of the Torah. Not only regarding the knowledge of true and false, but our moral system is objectified by the Torah, without which, there would be no objective "right" and "wrong". We see then how essential it is that we consult God's Torah in our attempt to arrive at absolute truth.

Maimonides approaches the question of "Does God create evil", as he does all questions; with a careful analysis of the Torah's choice words. You must follow his line of reasoning. Although a little technical, it will illuminate this topic.

**Different definitions of "Create":** Prior to reviewing the Torah's text, Maimonides clarifies a misconception of the word "create". He quotes the sect of Mutakallemim who viewed blindness and deafness as positive properties, thereby considering them actual creations of God. Maimonides demonstrates their error via analogy: One who removes an obstacle to another's motion, is in some effect "creating" motion. Similarly, one who removes a building's supporting pillar, in some way "creates" the ceiling's downwards motion. Although in both cases, the person's action was applied to the obstacle and the beam respectively, and not to "motion". Nonetheless, we say that the person acting on the obstacle and beam is a "creator" of the resulting movement. In the same way, one who removes light from a room, is said to have created darkness, although darkness is not something real, as is light. Darkness is merely that which is leftover when the light is removed. One may be called the creator of darkness in this sense, although nothing positive was created, as darkness has no positive existence.

Having shown this clear and valid distinction between two types of creation, i.e., real creation of a positive entity, and 'termed' creation of things such as darkness, Maimonides continues to examine a Torah passage dealing with this issue: Isaiah 45:7 states, "I form the light and create (boray) darkness, I make (oseh) peace and create (boray) evil..." Maimonides points to the distinction of the different words applied to light and darkness, peace and evil.

Regarding light, the word used is "yotzare", which means to form one thing from already existing matter. The sun was made from a material already in existence, therefore the term "yotzare" is employed. However, when describing the "creation" of darkness and evil, the word used by God is "boray", which refers to acting on nothingness, as in "In the beginning, God created (boray) heaven and Earth". Here too, God was creating our world from nothingness, so the word "boray" is used to teach just this point. The rule is that when God relates to nothingness, the term "boray" is used.

When this passage says God created "boray" darkness and evil, it means he created it in the following sense: He is the cause of darkness and evil only in as much as He created light and peace which can be removed - leaving darkness and evil. The fact that God does not create darkness as He creates an object is clear: He only creates positive entities. Creation per se means to affect a real object in some way. When there is an object, it can be spoken of as having been created. But darkness and evil are not positive entities, how then can one act on that which is not positive, but merely a privation? Creation is a force which causes something new to emanate as a positive entity, such as creation of the Earth, the Sun or any other real object. But darkness is not an object, and therefore it cannot be created.

**"Evil" has no real existence:** Maimonides then moves on to demonstrate what "evil" is. He shows all evils as privations, and not positive entities. Evil is termed as that which is lacking - it is not positive. For example, it is an evil that man is poor, or hungry, or blind, or ignorant. And in all these cases, the evil is where man has not achieved financial success, he has not eaten, he lost his sight, or he never became wise. The evil in all these cases is the deprivation of some real, positive object. Therefore, these evils were not created, because evils are not really in existence. They are terms denoting the lack of real positive entities as food, wisdom, or wealth. For this very reason, Maimonides teaches that the term "and it was good" is used in Genesis in reference to creation on each day. God only produces real existence, and all existence is good. All God's ways are good. God cannot create evil, as it cannot possibly be created.

I assume many might have expected the answer to take a much different course, perhaps more debatable of the possibility of viciousness in God. However, we are guided by Maimonides' truthful analysis of the very terms "create" and "evil", and the passage noted, until he elucidates their true meanings. We conclude that God cannot be the creator of evil.

The problematic theory that God creates evil vanishes, leaving a void - a void not "created", but descriptive of a place where there once stood our question. ■

Page 3