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Weekly Parsha

BeChukotai

RABBI BERNARD FOX

"If you will follow My decrees and observe My commandments and perform them, then I will provide your rains in their time, and the land will give its produce and the tree of the field will give its fruit." (VaYikra 26:3-4)

"Rabbi, my son doesn't want to go to synagogue." "Rabbi, my daughter has no enthusiasm for observing Shabbat."

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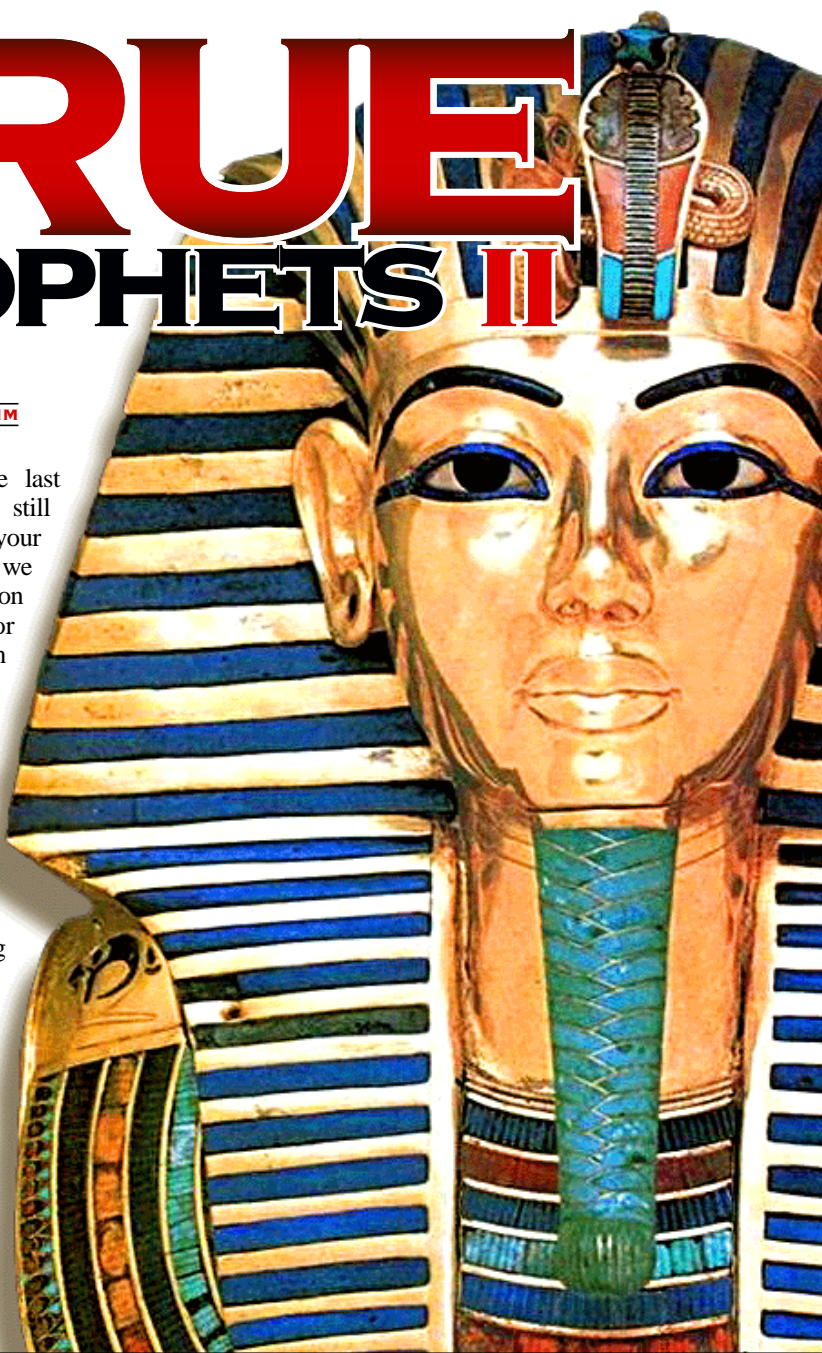
TRUE PROPHETS II

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

Colleen: In regards to the last question and answer, I am still unconvinced. I agree with your statement, "in all cases where we can explain away a phenomenon as naturally caused or coincidence, in any way, then the performer lacks any claim to prophecy...to working on behalf of God."

However, what I do not agree with is the authority of masses of people, particularly ages ago, when scientific knowledge was in its incipient stages, claiming to know the differences among legerdemains (sleight of hand), awesome natural phenomena, and authentic divine intercession. For example, the "plague" of the Nile turning to blood...even though "masses" witnessed this event, it can easily be explained as being "naturally caused" by the stirring of crimson sediment from the bottom of the river.

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God?!

is there a

WINTER

Whenever I go into a bookstore or pick up a publisher's listing, the thing that most hits me in the eye are the declarations, "God is dead"... "The Death of God"... and so on.

What I find most ironic about these announcements is, that if God is dead, or someone can describe how God has died, then, even for these people, there had to be a "living" God before. The other and more consistent approach to expel God from the realm of acceptability, are those who pose questions intended to be a testimony to the "nonexistence of the Almighty", stemming from unanswered questions like these:

"How could God allow the wanton murder of millions of innocent children?"

"Look around you, this whole earth designed in such way that a species must devour another one in order to survive."

"Does it seem to you that such cruel system of a dog-eat-dog world is the creation of a Supreme Being? Nonsense, this whole thing is an accident."

Accident? Wow...some accident.

What is surprising about these dismissive statements is that while we live in an age where mankind creates an increasing array of new elements including even new life (not only cloned animal/vegetations; but new, never before seen bacteriological existence) how can we not concede the possibility of a more advanced, far superior creative force in the universe?

When discovering a new archeologist's site, we never yell, "Hey, look at this beautiful accident site!" Instead, we all know that somewhere in the past there were some beings that created what we just discovered recently. So why is it so difficult for some people to look at this magnificent, perpetually-mobile, self-sustaining universe, and credit its Creator with at least a nod of respect? Especially nowadays, when our vision of this marvel is getting closer and closer to our scrutiny, why is it so difficult to acknowledge that there is at least as much design and order in the universe than in anything that man designs...Einstein did!

So many tributes and accolades were put forward by the greatest scientist of our era towards the accomplishments of God; that it would be nearly impossible to keep silent about it, and not to count Einstein the greatest scientific genius of our times, to be on the side of God. To the modernist ... "I am convinced that He (God) does not play dice," meaning that the Creator knows what He is doing and leaves nothing to chance, and latter he added that, "Science without religion is lame. Religion without science is blind." There is no clearer testimony than when according to a true man of science - as Einstein - one states there is no conflict between the scientists and the Creator. Since science in its own clumsy ways is imitating thinking and searching to find the meaning of the gift bequeathed by God to mankind.

Yet, even with his frequent declaration on the existence of God; a variety of religious organizations were steadily accusing Einstein for of preaching atheism. Why? Because he never defined God within the boundaries of the "religious" definitions.

Here we come to the crux of the matter, for the clergy of the religious world there was a need for a more formal testimony to God's existence. This need to know what was Einstein's true feelings about God came best expressed when Herbert Goldstein of the Institutional Synagogue, New York, confronting Einstein with a direct question; "Do you believe in God?" Einstein reply was, "I believe in Spinoza's God, who reveals himself in the orderly harmony of what exists, and not in a God who concerns himself with fates and actions of human beings."

This idea of the disinterested, detached God was not known by Spinoza and even less original by Einstein; but originated by the Greeks over twenty four hundred years ago in the era of Socrates, Plato, Aristotle and other great thinkers from the golden age of Greece. What is missing from the total picture that these disinterested gods, were family members of another venue of gods, instead of the one and only invisible and portable God of the Jews. "I am alone and no one stands besides Me", says the Only God. Our God is not a family man, with children and wives, whose spirit impregnates mortal women.

On the other hand, He is the God that both of these original two great thinkers Spinoza and Einstein has no problem instantly recognizing His greatness to the

point that both bent their knees and bowed their heads in front of the creative grandeur of God.

Einstein points to a unity in creation; Einstein views God's creations as one he can recognize by its unity. He uses the reason for his recognition factor that one finds the unity of similarity in the style and approaches a fellow creative artist or a composer. Imagine yourself walking through a great museum, and without having to look at the signature, yet able to recognize fully, "Oh, that is a Rembrandt", "a Rubin's", "a Leonardo de Vinci", "a Van Gogh". Imagine listening to a radio, hearing a Mozart, or Beethoven creation or a Gershwin piece and having no problem recognizing which is which. No big mystery, if you think about it. Why? Because all of these creative people are repeating what is in their own inner universe. That is why Einstein feels comfortable in the unity; in creation and that all he sees...is the creation of One.

Rabbi Herbert Goldstein - the man who posed the question to Einstein whether he believes in God or not - after hearing his answer concludes: "Einstein's theory if carried out to its logical conclusion would bring to mankind a scientific formula for monotheism. He does away with all thought of dualism or pluralism. There can be no room for any aspect of polytheism."

Of course, I can respect and even admire the God of Spinoza and Einstein, since it is easy to sympathize with such detached yet reassuringly perfectionist God. On the other hand there is no way we can agree with Rabbi Goldstein who so neatly packages the image and unifies the inner reflection of these men and presents it as a formula that fits all of mankind and cures everyone.

Logic is a wonderful gift from the Creator, but even a well working logic does not have what it takes to substitute for enthusiasm, only for benign admiration. It is as if a beauty contest judge looks at a great looking young woman, versus simply a young man who he praises for reasons, that while include her looks, it is only part of the equation: her walk, her smile, her deep warm voice, her sense of humor, and her compassion that bring her value to the point when admiration turns into love.

Hence for the sake of a wider picture, why don't we separate God, Religion and Clergy from each other since in reality these concepts are unrelated to each other and most time are in serious conflict with most of humanity most of the times?

I don't think many would argue the existence of God, a supreme being with unlimited power and incomprehensible intelligence. I believe that most people who think or confronted about the subject do believe in the existence of God. Even the most openly declared atheists are unable to erase the influence of God from their person. It is reassuring to feel that there is some purpose for the universe and therefore conversely there is a purposeful reason for the existence of man. It is important to feel that there

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God

was something before we reached our current level of awareness, as well to know that where we are is merely a stop in our journey toward our final but so far undisclosed purpose.

Does it require for us to have a deep religious belief before we can accept the premise that there is a purpose for our existence, or is there at least a hint in the process of creation that should make us - if not certain - at least confident about our purpose and future? Can modern man of science postulate a theory of purposeful growth from the multiple eyewitness testimony? Well, let me postulate and you judge it for yourself.

A being from the pre-natal age of at minimum of three months of pregnancy age, to about two years of post-natal age goes through its most active physical and cerebral learning phases. This whole time is spent in an intense and programmed preparation getting us ready to deal with how to survive and flourish through life. During these thirty months we increase our physical being several hundred folds, our cerebral activities grows to an immeasurable change, yet we have no awareness of this part of our life. We have no recollection what so ever about this most important part of our existence, yet it is clear to all of us that we were groomed and prepared in a most cared and protective way to be able to answer the challenges of the life we are about to begin. This is not an exercise in speculative logic, this is a series of events - witnessed events - and also at least a partial answer to the questions that all generations of mankind solicits all through the age, "Where do we come from, where are we going, is there a purpose for our existence?"

The answer to the first one "Where do we come from," is a thundering yes! The answer to the second one, "where are we going," while we do not have a definitive answer, but judging from where we came from and where we are, it seems that we as humans and as individuals heading toward yet undefined and so far incomprehensible progressive development. As for the third question, "is there a purpose for our existence?" Since mankind - thanks to it's Creator has with free will - the answer is up to us.

Moshe Ben-Chaim: While much of what you write makes sense, I disagree on other points you make. Rabbi Reuven Mann read your article above, and offered a rejoinder to the position that God is not involved with man, held by Spinoza and Aristotle. Rabbi Mann asked why God made such an elaborate cosmos baring such undeniable testimony to His wisdom. Why was such wisdom displayed; for lifeless planets, animals and plant life to marvel at?! It is clear, God embodied His wisdom in the universe so that it may be "perceived"...and there is but one perceiver: man. Thus, God must have intended to relate to man, as He created the universe, from which, for man may discover Him.

Furthermore, I add, God cannot create that which he is ignorant of. Aristotle avoids this dilemma by

postulating an eternal cosmos: since God never created the universe, one cannot impute His knowledge or interaction with it. It is as His shadow, as they say.

Some other points I wish to address. You write, "Here we come to the crux of the matter, for the clergy of the religious world there was a need for a more formal testimony to God's existence." In fact, the clergy or the Rabbis did not invent fact to cater to some heretofore-undressed need. As you mention Socrates, Plato, et al, you accept second hand knowledge of their existences. Employing this method you utilize to accept these great ones, you must also accept all other similarly proven events...including God's revelation at Sinai. And at this event, He gave a Torah - both Oral and Written Torahs - a fact from which original Judaism and the Rabbis unanimously never veered. Unless you are misunderstood, you seem to refer either to Sinai as this religious, "formal testimony", or to "observances". In either case, both are the works of God, and additionally, no less His works than are the cosmos. Thus, it is not the doings of the Rabbis that Judaism observes a "formal testimony", but the works of God.

You say Einstein reply was, "I believe in Spinoza's God, who reveals himself in the orderly harmony of what exists, and not in a God who concerns himself with fates and actions of human beings." But did or did not Einstein also say what you quoted earlier, "Science without religion is lame. Religion without science is blind"?

You write, "On the other hand there is no way we can agree with Rabbi Goldstein who so neatly packages the image and unifies the inner reflection of these men and presents it as a formula that fits all of mankind and cures everyone." If you take issue with a singular religion for all of mankind, was this not God's plan? He revealed Himself but once, with laws for all of mankind, be they a minimum of seven for Noahides, or 613 for Abraham's children. It is clear, there is one system, as there is only one "man".

You write, "God, Religion and Clergy are concepts that are unrelated to each other and most time are in serious conflict with most of humanity." Perhaps in action, but in not design, as God wishes all three to mesh effortlessly.

Finally, you asked, "Does it require for us to have a deep religious belief before we can accept the premise that there is a purpose for our existence, or is there at least a hint in the process of creation that should make us - if not certain - at least confident about our purpose and future?" You are well supported by the pre-Torah personality of Abraham, who embodied this very attitude. Religion was unnecessary for Abraham to arrive at a realization and fulfillment of his understood "purpose". But it is clear: God saw religion as a necessity shortly after Abraham's time. Abraham was truly one of a kind.

I enjoyed your article and look forward to your answers. ■

Letters

Tanya

VI

Jack: Out of all the replies I am sure you have received, have you received any replies on the Tanya subject that were any kind of explanation, that made any rational or logical sense?

Moshe Ben-Chaim: No one had any rational explanation for Tanya. Had they, I would have reprinted it. But there cannot be any rational explanation for that which violates reality.

Jack: My take on the section in question is that the author, at least the author of the notes, takes great effort to ensure that you take the words literally. In fact he explains a case in which one would surely understand words allegorically and then states that this is not the case with the words in question. He states that they are to be taken literally:

"The second, uniquely Jewish soul is truly part of G-d above."

"A part of G-d above" is a quotation from Scripture (Job, 31:2). The Alter Rebbe adds the word "truly" to stress the literal meaning of these words. For, as is known, some verses employ hyperbolic language. For example, the verse describing "great and fortified cities reaching into the heavens" is clearly meant to be taken figuratively, not literally. In order that we should not interpret the phrase "a part of G-d above" in a similar manner, the Alter Rebbe adds the word "truly", thus emphasizing that the Jewish soul is quite literally a part of G-d above." (Lessons In Tanya, published by "Kehot" [mainstream Lubavitcher Press] with a "Preface" by the Rebbe.)

Thus, the question arises: if one takes the words literally, must one believe that the Creator is composed of parts and therefore God is not incorporeal? Am I wrong?

Moshe Ben-Chaim: You are correct, and what that writer wishes to say is that "God possesses parts", and he says as you pointed out that these words are to be taken "quite literally." However, as Maimonides explains, such an idea is heresy, and against all reason. ■

A second issue that has still not been resolved for me is the following: the Israelites witnessed Moses go up the mountain to speak with God, they witnessed him come down the mountain with the tablets. It seems to me there is a key element missing in order for one to say that millions had witnessed a divine event: they do not witness "God giving the tablets to Moses" directly. So where is the authority of the masses here?

This is the problem with questions - they only lead to more questions!!!!

Best, Colleen

Moshe Ben-Chaim: Colleen, sometimes – hopefully most of the time – questions also lead to answers! Additionally, we all have no choice but to seek answers. Refraining from a question is no option. Let's see if I can answer you.

You suggest that the Plague of Blood may be caused by sediment. One problem is that you assume people cannot tell the difference between sediment-colored Nile water...and blood. Be careful not to omit any of your reference material. For it sounds as though you accept what the Bible writes about the Jews in Egypt, the existence of Egyptians, and a body of water called the Nile River. I wonder why you do not accept their recognition of what blood is. Had the Nile simply been stained by red sediment, why is the Nile viewed by both cultures at that moment, as real blood? Why is there no one back then disagreeing about the true nature of the liquid in the Nile, after Moses and Aaron smote that river? I think you must agree; they all knew how to distinguish blood from other liquids. This takes no great genius, or advanced scientific knowledge as you suggest. Authority of masses is only in question in connection with phenomena not readily understood, or outside the range of a typical human mind. But what human is unfamiliar with blood, or a mountain on fire? Both are easily apprehended, by anyone. The same applies to all the other plagues of lice, locusts, hail mixed with fire, frogs, wild beasts, darkness, etc.

Furthermore, Moses and Aaron did in fact distinguish between Pharaoh's magicians' sleight of hand, and God's true miracles. Otherwise, why would Moses and Aaron remain loyal to their God, if Egypt's sorcerers duplicated the miracles beyond Moses' detection of any inferiority from HIS miracles? The answer is that Moses and Aaron must have seen a difference between Egypt's hand tricks and God's real suspension of the very laws He controls. It must not be surprising to you that He who created natural law, may also suspend their function.

Add to this my argument that no one said, "it was not blood". This plague – as well as others –

occurred and ceased at appointed times: something impossibly produced by man who knows not when sediment will act up and dilute.

The clincher is that Moses did not predict only one plague, but Ten Plagues. The argument that nature caused all these plagues, precisely when Moses predicted, and they all abated when he prayed to his God, is untenable. The verses are too many to quote, but if you will study the Bible sections in Exodus, you will read that Moses asks Pharaoh when to end the plague, and based on Pharaoh's arbitrarily selected time, Moses concedes, prays, and the plague ceases precisely then. Nature cannot explain away how Moses' actions are precisely timed with arbitrarily selected hours, with Moses' acts of prayer, or that Moses should know when ten

succeeding natural events should occur. Colleen, I put it to you: How do you explain a plague where only firstborn people and animals die? This cannot be explained by nature.

Your second question too seems to be based on only a partial read of that amazing event at Sinai. There are many verses recalling how the Jews heard a voice from the flaming Mount Sinai, "but saw no form, only a voice". (Deut. 4:12) It is impossible that a voice emanating from fire is biological in nature. For fire is the single element in which no living organism may exist, let alone speaks, in a way that terrified these Jews as they said, "Let God not speak with us, lest we die." (Exod. 20:16) God orchestrated Sinai with fire precisely to act as a proof of His existence and His will that His one law be received by, and publicized through Abraham's descendants.

In addition to the Written Law (the Bible or Torah scroll) we also received the Oral Law. This remains in the possession of the Jews, in the form of the Talmud, and many sayings and records of the Rabbis. One such record transmits that the Ten Commandments were written in a miraculous manner. All who saw these Tables of Stone realized no human could make them. This



is the meaning of the Written Laws' words, "written with the finger of God." Now, as God has no "finger", this is understood to refer to a "miraculous writing". (Exod. 31:18) As a Rabbi once taught, Moses broke these first Ten Commandments, lest the people sin with them as they did with the Golden Calf. Moses feared this, as he assessed based on the Jews current Calf worship, that the Jews would see the miraculous nature of these tablets, and possibly worship them too.

Finally, I do not know how God "gave" the tablets to Moses. God takes up no space, He is not physical, and has no hands. His act of "giving" the Tablets to Moses might simply refer to the fact that He told Moses to descend with these prepared, miraculous stones, which God set up on the Sinai. But no act of "giving" needs to transpire, and therefore, there would not be anything for the Jews to 'see'.

The Jews had no doubt: the Torah Moses received, and what the Jews heard, was entirely God's doing. Our modern technologies and scientific studies give us no upper hand over those Jews 3317 years ago, in determining what is in fact God's revelation. ■

"Rabbi, my son never opens a sefer outside of school!" As an educator, I often hear concerns similar to these. The parents of these young men and women are searching for some way to reach and motivate their children. Often, it is assumed that in developing a strategy to motivate a student, we have broad freedom. In other words, we are not restricted by halacha in our choice of motivators. However, a careful study of some relevant comments from the Talmud and the commentaries indicates that this may not be the case.[1]

The passage above introduces a description of the rewards we will receive for devotion to the Torah and the punishments we will experience if we forsake the Torah. The clear message of the Torah is that we are encouraged to observe the Torah in order to secure these rewards and avoid the punishments. So, it seems that it is not inappropriate for a person to observe the Torah for personal – somewhat selfish – reasons. But does that mean that any motivator can be employed in order to encourage a student or ourselves to observe mitzvot?

Before we enter into this analysis we must resolve a fundamental issue. What is the appropriate or ideal motivation for the observance of a mitzvah? There is a general consensus among the Sages that the highest motivation is love of Hashem. Maimonides discusses this issue at some length in his commentary on the Mishna. He explains that the Torah is truth. Study of the Torah should be motivated by a desire to seek the truth. This same affinity for the truth will motivate a person to perform the mitzvot. Love of Hashem is a consequence of this same devotion to truth and knowledge – in fact, they are inseparable. Therefore, ideally a person observes the Torah because his devotion to truth and his love of Hashem demands this devotion.[2] With this introduction, let us return to our issue.

In Tractate Pesachim Rav Yehuda quotes Rav as teaching that a person should study Torah and perform mitzvot even out of secondary motivations. This is because the study and performance of mitzvot motivated by a secondary motivation, will eventually lead to observance of the Torah for the appropriate reason.[3] Rav recognizes that only those of us who are on a very profound spiritual level can be expected to observe the Torah for the appropriate reason. Most of us will not find love of Hashem to be an effective motivator. Rav encourages us to find other more mundane secondary motivators. Hopefully, the observance of the Torah – even as a result of these secondary motivators – will lead to observance motivated by love of Hashem.

There are two basic difficulties with Rav's comments. First, Rav is attempting to teach us something significant. It is unreasonable to assume that he is merely affirming the obvious. What is Rav's message? Stated differently, what would a person have concluded without Rav's message? It seems that Rav is telling us that a person must

observe the Torah even though the person is not motivated by the appropriate devotion to Hashem. This seems completely obvious! Would we have imagined that a person who is not moved by love of Hashem is exempt from performing the commandments? It is true according to some authorities, that in order to perform a commandment, one must be aware of the fact that the performance is a commandment. However, no authority maintains that a mitzvah can only be fulfilled by a person who has the highest motivation! In short, what is Rav telling us that is not obvious?

Second, although Rav's position is reasonable to the point of being obvious, there are a number of statements in the Talmud that explicitly contradict Rav. For example, in Tractate Berachot, the Rava comments regarding a person who performs mitzvot in response to a secondary motivation that it would be better that for this person not to have been created.[4] In Tractate Taanit, Rava comments that for a person who performs the Torah for secondary motives, rather than benefiting the person, the Torah serves as a fatal poison![5] How can we explain Rava's comments? Can his comments be reconciled with the common-sense views of Rav?

Maimonides provides this simplest solution to these problems. Essentially, Maimonides asserts that Rava's view is completely correct. The only proper motivation for the performance of mitzvot is love of Hashem. There are numerous comments by the Sages that confirm Rava's doctrine. We are chastised against using mitzvot for secondary purposes. We are warned against serving Hashem for the purpose of securing His rewards. We are told that we may not use our Torah scholarship as a means for securing the respect and adoration of others. However, these admonishments create a dilemma. Only a person who has achieved a profound level of spiritual perfection will be motivated by love of Hashem. Nonetheless, we are all commanded to observe the mitzvot of the Torah. How do we motivate ourselves and others who have not yet achieved the level of spiritual development in which love of Hashem and of truth becomes an effective motivator? How do we motivate the more common person or the novice? Maimonides suggests that this is Rav's issue. Rav explains that we are permitted to utilize secondary motivations in order to encourage ourselves and others to observe the Torah. However, these secondary motivations are only permitted as an expedient. We are not permitted to regard these secondary motives as an end in themselves. We must recognize that ultimately we must seek to serve Hashem out of love and for no other reason.[6]

Through this insight, Maimonides resolves both of the problems we have outlined. There is no contradiction between Rav and Rava. Each refers to a different stage in spiritual development. Rava tells us that ultimately a person must serve Hashem out of love. Rav tells us that as an expedient, we are permitted and even required to use secondary

motives until this ultimate level of motivation is achieved. Rav's lesson is also not as obvious as we first assumed. Rav is making two points that are significant. First, that as a matter of policy and practice, the teacher and spiritual leader can explicitly suggest and employ secondary motivators. Second, these motivators can not become and end in themselves. They are only permitted as an expedient.

Not all of the commentaries completely agree with Maimonides. Maimonides' assertion that secondary motivators should only be used as an expedient seems to be widely acknowledged. However, his contention that we have wide ranging freedom in selecting these motivators is challenged.

Tosefot and Rashi suggest that there is a significant limitation on the selection of motivators. Rashi suggests that it is not permitted to study Torah in order to better argue with and oppose others. According to Rashi, this is Rava's lesson. Rava does not disagree with Rav. He approves of utilizing secondary motivators. However, he alerts us that not every motivator is permitted.[7] Tosefot expand on Rashi's thesis. They explain that secondary motivators are permitted and encouraged. However, there is general principle that must be used in selecting secondary motivators. Motivators that appeal to some personal goal or objective are appropriate as an expedient. But motivators that appeal to an evil or corrupt element within the personality are prohibited. It is not completely clear where Tosefot draw the line between appropriate and inappropriate secondary motivators. But some indication is provided by the example that they provide. They explain that it is not permitted to study Torah for the purpose of opposing and effectively arguing and debating with other scholars – in order to promote one's own erudition or critique someone else's.[8] It seems that according to Tosefot and Rashi the line is drawn in regards to motivators that are antithetical to the mitzvah. Study of the Torah is a search for truth. If a person is primarily interested in winning an argument, truth becomes an insignificant consideration and the very essence of Torah study is compromised. Therefore, this motivation is not acceptable.

Rabbaynu Yom Tov Ishbili – Ritva – accepts the basic approach of Rashi and Tosefot. However, he argues that Rava's qualification is far more restrictive. Ritva maintains that our parasha is teaching us a fundamental lesson. It is outlining the appropriate secondary motivation. We are encouraged to observe the mitzvot out of fear – in order to avoid the terrible punishments outlined in this week's parasha or to secure the rewards promised by the Torah. However, one may not observe the Torah as a means of self-promotion.[9] Ritva's intention is not completely clear. But it seems that he is not merely asserting that self-promotion is an inappropriate motivator. He is restricting the selection of secondary motivators to fear of divine punishment and desire for divine reward. If this is the

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Weekly Parsha

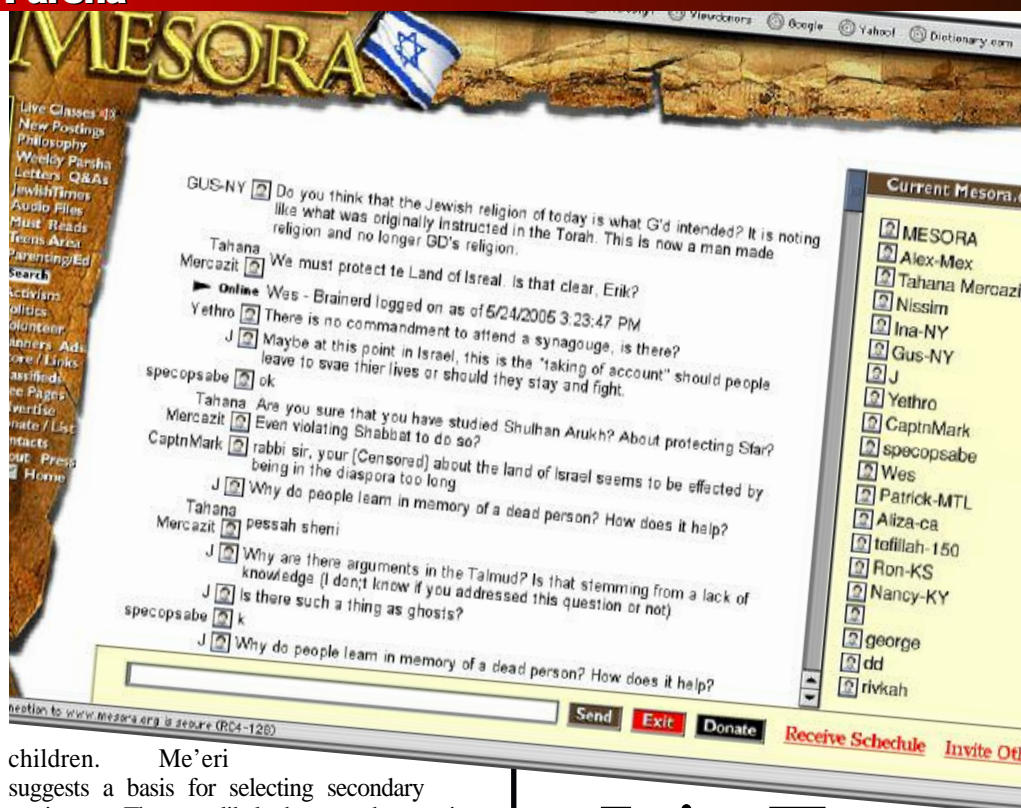
case, Ritva is alluding to a fundamental issue. According to Ritva, although secondary motivators are permitted, these motivators must always direct the person towards a relationship with Hashem. In other words, a person who observes the Torah out of a desire for self-promotion is not entering into a relationship with Hashem. In contrast, a person who observes the Torah out of fear a divine retribution or in order to secure His good favor is essentially entering into a relationship with Hashem. This relationship is fundamental to the performance of mitzvot. Therefore, although we are encouraged to seek expedients to motivate observance, these expedients must be consistent with the fundamental nature of observance – relating to Hashem.

One of the most elaborate and detailed treatments of our issue is provided by Rabbaynu Menachem Me'eri. Me'eri suggests that there are various levels of secondary motivators. The best secondary motivator is fear of divine retribution and desire for divine reward. He argues that this secondary motivator is most likely – virtually certain – to lead to observance based on love of Hashem. However, other personal secondary motivators are also encouraged. But they are not preferable. He asserts that other motivators are viable routes to service motivated by love of Hashem. However, the effectiveness of such expedients is not as certain. In other words, secondary motivators must be assessed based on their likely effectiveness in leading to service motivated by love of Hashem. From this perspective, observance motivated by fear of divine retribution or desire for reward is preferable to observance motivated by some other personal goal. But Me'eri draws the line at self-promotion. This motivation is inappropriate.[10]

Me'eri's comments are noteworthy for two reasons. First, although he does not come to precisely the same conclusions as Maimonides, he affirms one of his basic premises and states it quite clearly. All secondary motivations are only of value insofar as they serve as an expedient. But the secondary motivator cannot become and end in itself. Second, although Me'eri does not agree with Ritva, he does accept Ritva's basic premise. Fear of divine punishment and desire for reward are unique motivators. They are predicated upon and support a relationship with Hashem.

So what is the bottom line? According to Rav it is appropriate to use secondary motivators in order

to encourage observance. However, these motivators can only serve as an expedient. The ultimate objective is for a person to observe the Torah out of love of Hashem. Therefore, we must provide our children with meaningful Torah scholarship. It is impossible to progress and develop towards love of Hashem without Torah study and scholarship. At the same time we must provide other motivators that are consistent with the age and maturity level of our



children. Me'eri suggests a basis for selecting secondary motivators. The more likely the secondary motivator will lead to love of Hashem, the better the motivator. Are any motivator's off limits? It seems that Tosefot and Rashi would not allow a secondary motivator that is antithetical to the mitzvah being performed. Ritva and Me'eri clearly view self-promotion as an inappropriate motivator but this is not agreed to by all authorities. Maimonides does not make this distinction and explicitly mentions self-promotion as an effective secondary motivator. ■

[1] This issue was brought to my attention by Rabbi Moshe Bleich. For a study of the practical implications of the material discussed in this week's Thoughts, see his article, "Prizes for Academic Achievement," Ten Da'at, Winter 2000, pp27-35.

[2] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Commentary on the Mishne, Mesechet Sanhedrin 10:1.

[3] Mesechet Pesachim 50b.

[4] Mesechet Berachot 17a.

[5] Mesechet Taanit 7a.

[6] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Commentary on the Mishne, Mesechet Sanhedrin 10:1.

[7] Rabbaynu Shlomo ben Yitzchak (Rashi), Commentary on the Talmud, Mesechet Berachot 17b.

[8] Tosefot, Mesechet Pesachim 50b.

[9] Rabbaynu Yom Tov ben Avraham Isbili (Ritva), Commentary on the Talmud, Mesechet Yoma 72b.

[10] Rabbaynu Menachem Me'eri, Bait HaBechirah, Mesechet Pesachim 50b.

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JUDAISM NO SALVATION

Jack: You asked me to write you about a statement that I posted in the class yesterday. I missed part of your comments my sound went off for a few seconds. I just heard that you asked me to write to you about the statement, "Salvation is not a question for the Jew, but what mitzvah can I do next." Actually, it is sort of a paraphrase that I read in one of the very first books that I read about Judaism, "What Christians should know about Jews and Judaism," World Books, Rabbi Yechiel Eckstein, chapter 2, p. 66.

I will now give the entire section:

"...Rabbi Heschel described the differences between Judaism and Christianity on this fundamental issue in the following manner:

'Christianity starts with one idea about man; Judaism with another. The idea that Judaism starts with is that man is created in the likeness of G-d. You do not have to go far, according to Judaism, to discover that it is possible to bring forth the divine within you and the divine in other men. There is always the opportunity to do a mitzvah. It is with that opportunity that I began as a Jew. Christianity begins with the basic assumption that man is essentially depraved and sinful - that left to himself he can do nothing. He has to be saved. He is involved in evil. This is not the Jewish way of thinking. The first question of Christianity is: 'What do you do for the salvation of your soul?' I have never thought of salvation. It is not a Jewish problem. My problem is what mitzvah can I do next. Am I going to say a blessing? Am I going to be kind to another person? Am I going to study Torah? How am I going to Honor the Sabbath? These are my problems. The central issue in Judaism is the mitzvah, the sacred act. And it is the greatness of man that he can do a mitzvah. How great we are that we can fulfill the will of G-d! But Christianity starts with the idea that man is never able to fulfill the will of G-d. All he has to do, essentially, is to wait for salvation'."

Also, this was one of my first connections with the idea of the Sheva Mitzvot.

Shalom, Jack E. Saunders

Moshe Ben-Chaim: Jack, I agree fully with the accurate distinction you have cited. We certainly do not ascribe to God the concept of a "doomed" man, waiting for his salvation, as if he cannot repair himself with his God given intelligence. On the contrary, God provided man with both; his physical body, his metaphysical (soul), and a guide (the Torah) so man may reach perfection independently. The idea of "salvation" implies that something external to man's own actions is responsible for his improved state. Thus, according to Christianity, man is not responsible for his actions, and his free will appears to be useless. For why can he not change himself for the good? "Salvation" attempts to forfeit any condemnation for man's evils – a very dangerous position.

However, based on the Talmud's depiction of

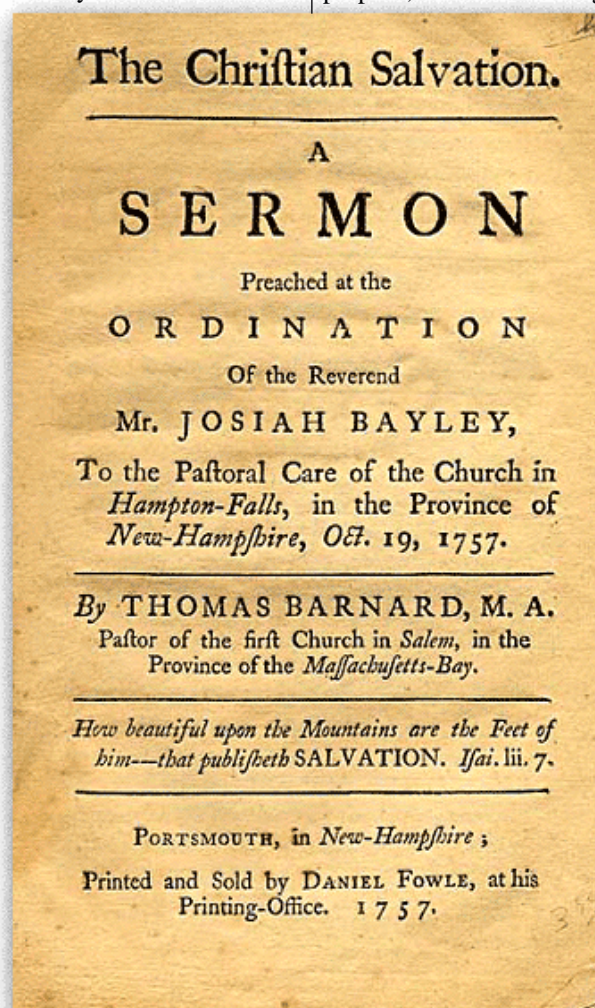
Torah study as the most prized activity, I would correct the part that says, "The central issue in Judaism is the mitzvah" and replace it with "The central issue in Judaism is Torah study". As Maimonides says, a mitzvah meant to occupy our minds, when uninvolved in Torah study. Hence, Torah study, as the Talmud says, is the most prized activity, over all mitzvahs.

Contrary to this view is what permeates many communities today: the goal is the mitzvah, as if the simple act, devoid of understanding, elevates man. The reason we do not agree with this view, is based on the reality of what man's essence is: his soul. Man's soul is his Divine gift, granted to him and no other creation. As such, God desires that this soul be engaged. But in simple motor activity of waving a Lulav, donning Tefillin or other actions, if we are devoid of the underlying concepts, then the mitzvah loses meaning and purpose, which is to engage the mind. Any

simple motor activity can easily be performed with a disengaged mind. The real purpose in mitzvah is that man evaluates all of his actions all day, engaging his thought, while he is not steeped in Torah study, where he perceives what he could of His Creator's wisdom.

This does not belittle mitzvah, as mitzvah is God's desire for man, and thus, an objective "good". I simply wish to convey "mitzvah's role, as compared to Torah study, which is second to none. Mitzvah is no panacea for perfection if we have not; 1) become aware, and 2) become

convinced of a truth contained in or conveyed by a mitzvah. Motor activity cannot be man's perfection, when he is gifted with a mind that can study and educate others on the marvels of creation and Torah. ■



REFLECTION

THE TRUE ENEMIES OF TODAY'S SINGLES

ANONYMOUS

Every Thursday morning we end our prayers with Psalm 81, which was chanted in the Temple by the Levites (Tamid, 7:4): "If Israel would walk in My ways, I would immediately subdue their Enemies, and turn my hand against their Tormentors."

Today, 200,000 Jewish singles live in the U.S.A. and Israel. Why aren't these Jewish young men and women finding their mates? Do these singles have "Enemies and Tormentors" who are preventing them from reaching the chuppah? Much advice has been given for external help, on how family, friends, work associates and matchmakers should take action to help find mates for these singles. However, all this advice could be futile, because the answer to this dilemma could be found internally.

This verse refers to Israel's "national" Enemies and Tormentors. However, I take liberty and suggest that we may also apply these appellations to our own internal Enemies and Tormentors. Self-examination, by every young man and woman, followed by the correction of their faulty ways, has the potential to regain Hashem's assistance, against even himself. Any person who does Teshuvah (repentance) earns a closer relationship with the Creator who desires that we live in line with Torah, and not sin. Maimonides teaches concerning one who repents, "Yesterday, this one was hated before God; vile distant and abominable. But today he is loved, precious, close and beloved". (Laws of Repentance, 7:6) God is closer to he who repents. God may help to subdue these internal tormentors, paving their initiated road to teshuva with smoother ground.

Since the appetitive and sexual gratifications top

the list of our most powerful urges, these are two areas of sin that singles might examine first to determine if they are at fault, and against and distant from God. Breaking the pattern of engaging in these sins is probably the most difficult hurdle a person will ever face. However, the urge can be mastered, right at the beginning, using great fortitude and intellectual strength. Sforno says this on the verse, "Man will, conquer you (the snake) at the head, and you will succeed man at the heel" (Gen. 3:15) that this means the following: man will conquer his instincts at the "head" (beginning) of the battle with his instinctual urge, but he will succumb to the snake (instincts) at the "heel" (end) of the battle; if man allows his or her urges to go un-assailed, they will loose to the instincts. But in all fairness, singles and married people share an equal tendency to violate these sins.

Of equal importance is the command to "Keep My Sabbaths." Unfortunately, thousands of singles were raised by parents who gave little importance to observing the Sabbath. These parents didn't "build bridges of Torah" in their homes, across which the children could cross. These parents observed nothing but materialism. Some smart singles wake up by themselves, and ask the question, "Why is my life all topsy-turvy? Why aren't I married? Maybe it's my way of life. Maybe I should find out about the Torah. If my parents forfeited their soul, I am wise not to allow their faulty upbringing to cast a shadow on my free will."

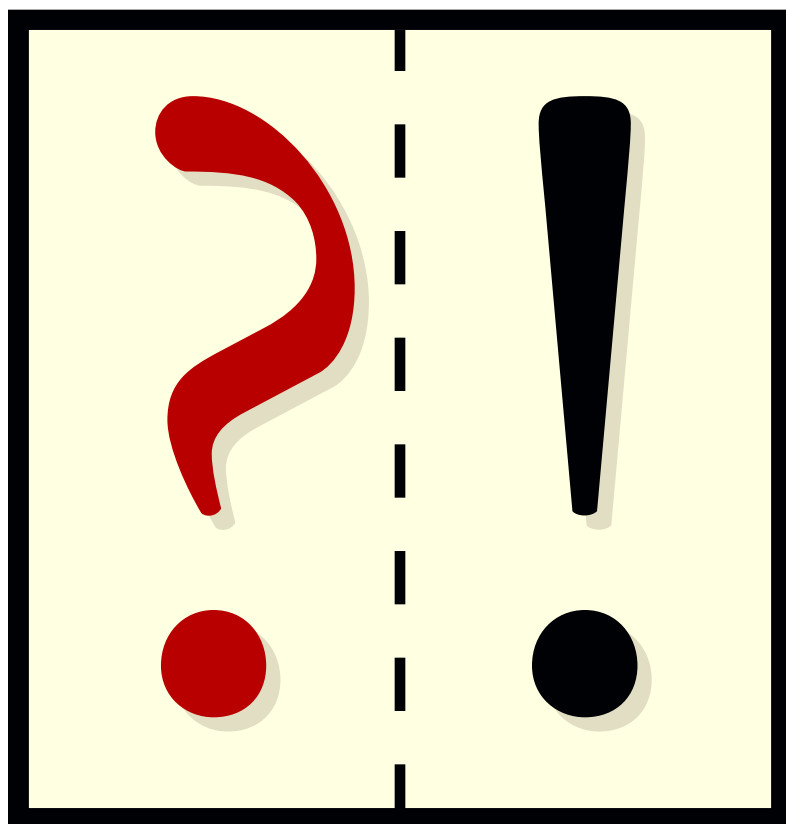
If the singles make the first effort to rid themselves of their Enemies and Tormentors within, Hashem can pick up from their initiation,

and assist. But if the singles are too weak to reform, to give up illegal pleasures, their entrenchment will only pull them down deeper and deeper. The bottom of the pit sometimes is their conclusion to look for a mate outside the Jewish religion.

How does one go about self-examination? A motivated individual will not spare any effort to look at his secret sins. It boils down to a question and answer session with one's self. Above all else, singles must critique their constructed images of desired mate. This one error may be the greatest villain of all. One must also be willing to forfeit fantasies of the "perfect partner". And here too, the Torah steps in, spotlighting those great personalities who portray the qualities of a truly good mate.

Also, recognition of one's own lacking emotional makeup may unveil impulses keeping him or her away from intimacy, responsibility, or any other feeling one detects an aversion towards. Positive and/or negative motivation may also assist one to moves towards marriage: "I want to have someone to share my life, to have children with and fulfill the command of procreation." Focusing on wanting to "walk in Hashem's ways", with the knowledge of the rewards from above. Or negative motivation, "When I cross over into the next world, will I be able to answer to God in the affirmative, that I tried to walk in His ways?"

It is a very sad spectacle, to see our present generation saturated with so many young, stiff-necked singles, who are unwilling to correct themselves, and not want to live a Torah way of life. ■



Faith vs Proof

Gil Student: Moshe Ben-Chaim is quoted saying, "Conviction surpasses faith". However, this quote is irrelevant because he attempted to entirely delegitimize faith as, "A disease which so called religious' Jews cleave to and spread...the Christian ethic of 'blind faith'." Once Moshe Ben-Chaim grants simple faith legitimacy, even as a secondary and less-than-ideal position (as

he says proof "surpasses" faith) he is recanting from his original all-out condemnation of faith as foreign to Judaism.

Moshe Ben-Chaim: When "A" is said to surpass "B", this may mean one of two things: "A" is quantitatively "better", implying "B" is somewhat a good -- OR

-- this may mean "A" is a good, and "B" is NOT a good at all. In either case, "A" may be said to "surpass" "B".

Applying this to "Proof vs Faith" my words critiqued by Gil, proof is truly better than faith. For with faith that God exists, one's mind is not engaged. Hence, to say that "A" surpasses "B", or rather, "proof surpasses faith", we may also mean that faith is not legitimized, unlike Gil suggests. Although I do agree, that better phraseology would have pinpointed this idea better. Perhaps, to Gil's credit, at the time that I wrote "Conviction surpasses faith" I was not yet of the opinion that faith was in fact lacking any meaning. So let me speak my current view.

The truth about this is as follows: if a man utters the words "I believe in X", yet he has no reason to say so without proof, then we say his statement is useless. If his mind is not engaged, as he possesses no proof and conviction, then his statement does not reflect conviction. He might as well be silent. Ask yourselves this, "What use is there to agree to something, if you don't feel 100% convinced?" There is no use, and this type of statement is a lie.

For this reason, I say that proof surpasses faith, as faith is a statement about that which your mind is not yet convinced about. It is a lie. Conversely, when one has proof of something, and he says so, he is then describing what is real.

God gave us intelligence to obtain conviction of what is real, and not to blindly parrot that which makes us appear pious; intelligence is not required to parrot. Ask any parrot if it needs to have a soul in order to repeat things, it will 'tell' you it doesn't!

Translation: don't seek to impress man with empty words, projecting a false image of your piety. Rather, seek to apprehend what is true, i.e., God's creation and wisdom, and concern yourself none for man's applause. ▀