

Fundamentals: Part VII



Judaism: The only religion completely harmonious with the universe. Only Judaism's laws and tenets reflect proven, universal truths. The Rabbis too formulated the most central truths of reality in their blessings, prayers, and laws. God created the universe, and Judaism. By definition they must be complimentary. The Kedusha embodies this unification.

ESTD
1997

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

JewishTimes

Volume IV, No. 46...Sept. 9, 2005

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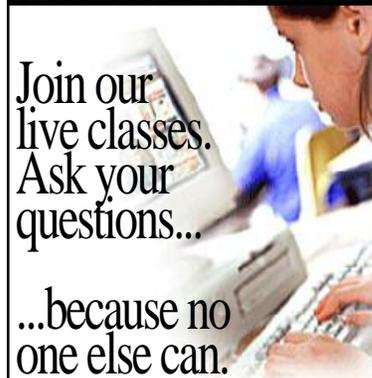
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Weekly Parsha

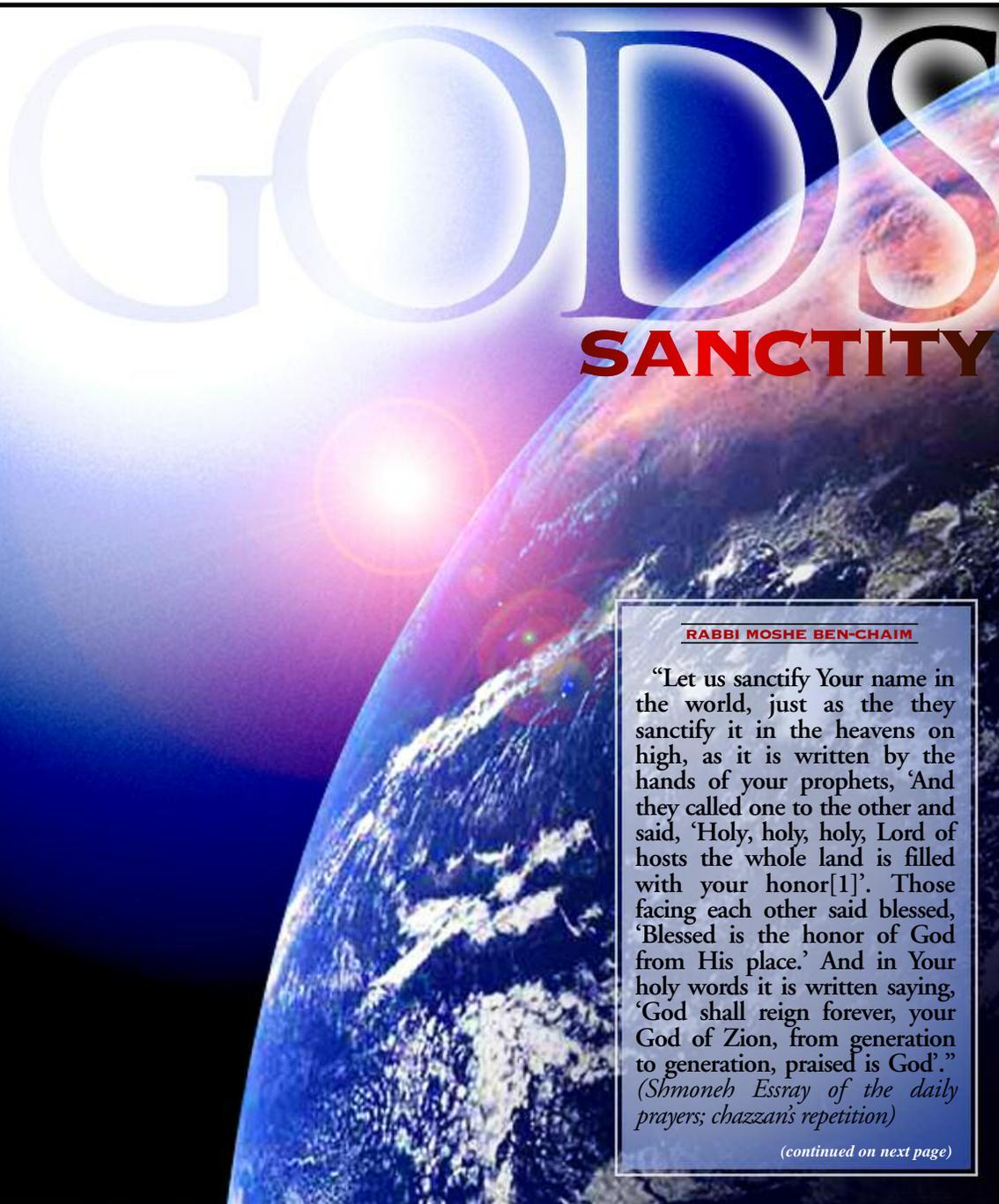
Shoftim

RABBI BERNARD FOX

“When you go forth to war against your enemy and you see horses and chariots and a nation that is more numerous than yourself, do not fear them. For Hashem your G-d who brought you up from Egypt is with you.” (Devarim 20:1)

Before going to war a special Kohen is appointed to accompany

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RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

“Let us sanctify Your name in the world, just as the they sanctify it in the heavens on high, as it is written by the hands of your prophets, ‘And they called one to the other and said, ‘Holy, holy, holy, Lord of hosts the whole land is filled with your honor[1]’. Those facing each other said blessed, ‘Blessed is the honor of God from His place.’ And in Your holy words it is written saying, ‘God shall reign forever, your God of Zion, from generation to generation, praised is God’.”
(Shmoneh Esray of the daily prayers; chazzan's repetition)

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Fundamentals

JewishTimes

Weekly Journal on Jewish Thought



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What is the unique message of the Kedusha? That, which is often repeated, seizes our attention least: precisely the fault of its familiarity. Our attention is normally aroused towards that which is novel and new. However, we must rethink whether this is proper, or if in fact, this counter-intuitive thinking should not remain self-guided. The Rabbis would not have instituted a four-times-daily recitation of that which is not crucial to Jewish thought. Although quite brief, the Kedusha contains ideas central to Jewish life. Kedusha is recited three times in the morning prayers: once in after Borachu in the Yotzre Or blessing; once in Shmoneh Essray (if there are ten men) and once in Uva L'Tzion just prior to Alenu. We recite the Kedusha once again in the afternoon prayers in the Shmoneh Essray when ten men are present. (I only assume it is not part of evening prayers, since at their inception, evening prayers were not obligatory, although today all Jews treat them as obligatory.) But let us first understand the text of this Kedusha.

“Let us sanctify Your name in the world, just as the they sanctify it in the heavens on high, as it is written by the hands of your prophets.”

It is clear that we are ‘mimicking the angels’. This paralleled by our standing throughout the day on Yom Kippur, when again we desire to elevate our actions as high as possible. (Angels are said not to have knee joints, and thus, can only “stand” with no sitting. But this too is allegorical, as angels are not physical bodies.) Hence, mimicking angels demonstrates our wish to achieve the height of human perfection, both in ideas and actions. Now, since the angels “praise” God, we mimic their perfection of expression by repeating their words. Certainly, as God included the words of the angels in man’s Torah, “written by the hands of your prophets” we thereby derive proof that this is in fact God’s will: that we know what the angels “say”[2]. We must not overlook a central idea mentioned by a wise Rabbi: even the angels can only praise God’s “name”, but not God Himself: “Let us sanctify Your name in the world.” This means that nothing, not even angels, praise the true idea of what God is[3]. Certainly, man has no positive knowledge of God. Thus, praising the “name” of God means praising our “reference” of God, and not God Himself, since nothing knows His essence, but He alone.

“And they called one to the other”

What is this idea that they “called to each other”? Rashi states that if an angel would praise God independently, preceding the other angels, that angel would be “consumed by fire”. Of course, since angels are not physical, fire is a

metaphor that the “angel would require destruction”, or better, it “deviated from its objective,” no longer serving any purpose, and deserves annihilation. But we also know that angels are not human, and therefore have no “free will” to deviate from their course and design established by God. Thereby, Rashi states that no angel can ever deviate, and no angel would be destroyed for violating God’s will, as they cannot: they have no free will. Nonetheless, angels do “praise” God. Their “praises” are perfect, and we use them since our formulated praises of God would be lacking.

We do not know precisely what angels are, however, whatever information the Torah offers us is accurate, and if we perceive something clearly, we can discuss it, unless it belongs to the topic of Creation or the Divine Chariot, which must not be taught except one scholar to another, and even then, only by way of hints regarding the head categories. We do not violate this prohibition by discussing ideas, which King David stated in Psalm 104. And appropriately timed, King David’s Psalm, which we read this week on account of Rosh Chodesh, discusses angels. King David states, “He makes His angels the winds, His ministers, flaming fires.” (104:4) Angels, then, may be understood as natural laws; things that govern the physical world, i.e., laws of wind and fire. The fact that King David states, “He ‘makes’ His angels wind”, and not, “His angels ARE wind” teaches that the elements of wind and fire are not themselves angels, but may be appointed at times as His angels or messengers. This appellation of “angel” or agent would depend on whether God desires wind, fire or any element to act in an altered manner to achieve His will. An example was when God suspended the effects of fire on Chananya, Mishael and Azarya when thrown into the furnace, and escaped unscathed. Here, fire was God’s angel or ‘agent’ in achieving His objective. Similarly, the Talmud states, “Each blade of grass has an angel that says grow.” There are many cases of angels. We cannot do justice with few words, nor do I possess that understanding. But suffice to say that angels are created things, and in some fashion, offer perfected praise to God. How angels “praise” God is yet to be explained.

Psalm 104, referred to by its opening words “Borchi Nafshi” (“My soul will praise...”) is recited on Rosh Chodesh, and for good reason. Rosh Chodesh, the New Month, manifests the completion and renewal of God’s lunar and solar laws, which He established during creation. As such, creation becomes the theme of Rosh Chodesh. This is further seen when Rosh Chodesh and Sabbath coincide: the special “Atah Yatarta” prayer (“You have created Your world from time immemorial”) replaces the regular

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Sabbath Musaf. This special prayer was coined to emphasize the dual aspects of physical creation embodied in the Sabbath, and its governing, cyclical natural laws, embodied in the New Moon. God created two things: 1) physical matter and 2) the laws governing that matter. Perhaps this explains Genesis that says that the Earth was “unformed and void”, and only afterwards, all creation manifested itself at God’s will. First, raw matter (“hyle” see Ramban) existed at God’s word, and then matter took form. Then formation of matter was due to God’s secondary will that matter possess self-governing laws.

The Borchy Nafshi also encompasses all of creation. King David describes the creation of light, the heavens, earth, oceans, their guiding laws, rivers, mountains, animals, man, the purpose of the seasons and times, our satisfaction in food, God’s wisdom, and His Earthly providence. Explaining angels as natural laws, we also understand why King David cites angels in the beginning verses of Borchy Nafshi: all else (the physical world) cannot exist without angels (laws) governing each element’s properties and interactions with other creations. Therefore, angels, or natural laws must be created during the initial phases of Creation. King David not only enumerates all in creation, but he does so in the

order that each was created.

Note that King David concludes Borchy Nafshi with words “May the glory of God endure forever”, similar to the Kedusha’s conclusion. But we do see that angels are mentioned as part of creation, which King David praises in Borchy Nafshi. Although we have digressed, Borchy Nafshi does underscore our theme.

Returning to the angels, or natural laws, why must they “praise” God in unison, with no individual angel preceding another? Perhaps this idea is that anything created by God, has as its purpose, the pronouncement of God’s existence and majesty. Perhaps, there can be no other reason that God would have

produced physical entities bearing His wisdom, other than to attest to His role as Creator. We may then say that “angels praise God unanimously”, meaning, all of creation, including angels (natural laws) attest to the greatness of the Creator. All we see – be they objects, or laws governing those objects – have as their singular goal, the display of God’s wisdom. In a manner of speaking, creation “praises” God at all times, or “unanimously”. Perhaps for this reason, King David commences his Borchy Nafshi with those very words, “My soul praises God.” as King David sees this act of praising God to be God’s will, and conforms to the objective of creation, by himself, praising God.

We now understand one meaning of “angels praising God”. This means that the forces of nature[4] – the operation of the universe from the spheres to the ants – all reveal God’s infinite wisdom. Creation is then “praising God”. Similarly King David stated in his Psalm 148, “Praise Him sun and moon, praise Him all stars of light.” Inanimate objects as these magnificent, heavenly spheres, have no ability to conceptualize or verbalize. Therefore, the notion described by King David that these spheres “praise God” means their existence is a testimony to God’s greatness, “as if” they praise God. So too we read in the Iyun Tfila explaining

the words in the morning prayers: “And they (angels) all open their mouths: This is stated in human terms.” Iyun Tfila states quite clearly that angels are not capable of “utterances”, but it is “as if” they offer praises to God when man witnesses the precision and orchestration of the universe’s laws. He also says, “angels are forces with no bodies”. This describes natural law. He further explains the words angels “standing” as “prepared” to do God’s will. Now, returning to the Kedusha, what did the angels say?

TEXT OF THE KEDUSHA

Principle I: “Holy, holy, holy, Lord of hosts, the whole land is filled with Your honor”[5]

The word holy properly translated means “distinct” or “separated”. Similar, of a person makes his cow “holy” for the Temple, he “distinguishes” it for Temple service, exclusive to all other uses. God is the one who is most distinct, and to whom the description “holy” is most befitting: He is far above everything. How can we elaborate on this idea? How may we cover all of creation, stating that God is above “all”?

Radak offers two views for the threefold praise of “holy”. We can state that God is distinct from the three categories of creation: 1) the world of souls and angels, 2) from the heavens, and 3) from Earth. These are the three worlds created by God, and why the angels said, “holy, holy, holy” or, “distinct, distinct, distinct”. This is Radak’s view. But Radak also records the view of the Targum and the Kuzari who say that God is, 1) distinct from the metaphysical world “where” He dwells, 2) God is distinct from the physical world, where He performs His might, and 3) He is distinct eternally. (Recall that King David too concluded Borchy Nafshi with this idea of “eternal” grandeur.)

This second view of the Targum and the Kuzari is the path I will take in explaining the Kedusha. To reiterate, the praises of the angels which we mimic, are that God is distinct from both parts of creation; from the metaphysical world, from the physical, and that His greatness is eternal.

Principle II: “Blessed is the honor of God from His place”

Now, although we praise God based on what is

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perceived, we must counter any false understanding that we have perceived God Himself. We state that He is distinct “from His place”. We are again mimicking the angel’s words (Ezekiel 3:12), “Blessed is the honor of God from His place.” This means that God is unknowable. Of course, God has no “place” just as an idea takes up to space. We mean that God is to be praised, “whatever He is”, or “from His unknowable place”. God killed many Jews for violating the idea that He is unknowable. They include the 57,000 Jews who looked inside the Ark when returned by the Philistines, as well as Aaron’s two sons Nadav and Avihu, who sought to worship God in a manner not commanded. Similarly, God commanded the Jews not to ascend Mount Sinai at Revelation, lest they do so out of a desire to “see” something in connection with God. Moses warns the Jews “you saw no form” at Sinai[6] again reiterating the gravity of sin harbored by any person who attributes corporeality to God.

These two concepts regarding God, which the angels praise, that 1) He is the creator and His glory is seen everywhere, and 2) that He is not physical or knowable, form the first of Maimonides’ 13 Principles. We appreciate how unified the Rabbis were regarding the fundamental ideas of Judaism.

Principle III: “God shall reign forever, your God of Zion, from generation to generation, praised is God”

As the Targum and the Kuzari stated, the third and final “holy” refers to the idea that God is eternal. This is of vital importance to our notion of God. For how may we hold God in such esteem, were it not for the fact that His greatness is essential to His nature, meaning, that He is certainly eternal? Had God been limited in His power and rule, we would understand that something other than Him placed this limitation on Him. He would not be God. But limitation is a phenomenon of the physical world, like division and location, and thus, cannot be predicated of God. He is eternal, since He has no limitations.

The structure of the Kedusha is therefore designed to imbue man with three vital ideas: A) God is Creator and evidence of His wisdom is seen throughout the universe. This is sensible, since He in His infinite wisdom created all that exists; B) God is unknowable; C) God’s greatness is eternal. We repeat what the angels “said” since angels perfectly praise God. We also learn that all of creation is to attest to God’s role as the one Creator, and the angels “praises” display this idea.

THREE TIMES IN PRAYER

Kedusha I: Yotzare Or

Why do we recite this Kedusha in the Yotzare Or blessing, discussing God’s creation? In Otsar Tefilos, the Iyuntar Tefila states, “After we have completed the praises of God for His creation of the luminaries, we begin to praise Him for His creation of the angels, that He created to tell of His praise.” (pg. 257) This means to say that our praises of God would be incomplete, if we praise only part of His creation, i.e., the physical world. We must also praise God for His creation of the laws of nature and providence, the angels, certainly, as angels were “created to tell His praise”.

But this is an interesting statement, “angels were created to tell His praise”. How does natural law and providence offer more appreciation for God’s wisdom (“tell His praise”) than mere, brute creation? Our first deduction is that which embodies God’s wisdom to a higher degree (than the physical creation) certainly deserves to be praised. This makes sense. But in what sense do natural laws surpass physical bodies in evidencing God’s wisdom?

I suggest that with God’s creation of the universal laws, the angels, we witness a “functioning” universe. We come to understand a “plan”, which translates to understanding God’s will. We would not understand God’s will if we did not see a use (interaction) for the innumerable, physical creations. For if all physical bodies remained separate from all others, no plan would be seen. No understanding of “why” all exists could be available. But now that we see that smaller animals also exist as prey for larger ones, that winged animals use flight for obtaining food, that water flows since far reaches on Earth are arid and need moisture, and when we witness the solar and lunar phenomena...we learn a plan. We see more of God’s wisdom. Thus, it makes sense to say, “Angels were created to tell His praise”. This means “natural laws” reveal more of God’s wisdom. It is then quite appropriate that the Rabbis inserted the Kedusha in the blessing of God’s creations.

Furthermore, with the existence of natural laws, there is a continued cycle of behaviors in which man may observe over time. For if there were chaos, there could be no “laws” to

observe. Study of any law requires that that very law is consistent...for human observations take time. Primarily, we define a law as any given phenomenon sustaining its properties and behaviors; otherwise, such phenomena it will not be viewed as a law.

Kedusha II: Shmoneh Essray

The Rabbis aptly incorporated these ideas into the Shmoneh Essray blessing that discuss God’s holiness, (separateness) the “Atah Kadosh” blessing. But this idea that God is unknowable is not reserved for the Atah Kadosh blessing alone. A wise Rabbi once lectured on how the core of the Shmoneh Essray – the first three blessings – directs us away from our ‘familiar’ idea of God, towards an admission of our complete ignorance of His nature.

The Rabbi stated that we commence with “God of Abraham”. As we are familiar with Abraham, we relate to God in a familiar, and comfortable fashion. We then proceed to the blessing of Resurrection. Here too, we refer to God inasmuch as He relates man. Now, although no personality (Abraham) is mentioned, man is still referred to in this blessing of God’s planned resurrection. We feel comfortable that God relates to man in this way, but we feel more distant in our relationship to God, as no known personality is mentioned. Finally, we divorce ourselves from any mention of any man, and in this third blessing, we describe God as “kadosh”, or unknowable. The progression is clear: we refer to the God of specific man – Abraham – then progress to referring to God in a less personal manner with no individual mentioned (resurrection), and conclude by declaring our complete ignorance of God’s nature with the words “You are distinct.” As these three blessings form the core of Shmoneh Essray, we conclude that Shmoneh Essray is essentially designed to move man towards a more correct view of God, essentially, that we have no understanding of Him: He is “kadosh”.

Kedusha III: Uva L’Tzion

In this prayer, we commence with God’s deliverance of the Messiah, and His oath that Torah will always remain in Israel...eternally. “Eternal” is the third of the three concepts of the Kedusha, and therefore, Kedusha was inserted here a third time to highlight this third theme. The only prayer after Uva L’Tzion is the Alenu, which also concludes with this theme, “God will reign forever.”

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Summary

Due to the fundamental nature of the Kedusha, and on the macro level, the Rabbis saw fit to permeate our entire morning prayers with these three ideas, in their corresponding three locations: 1) from the very first mention in Yotzare Or which highlights God's creation, 2) to the Shmoneh Esray which focuses on God's unknowable nature, 3) through the Uva L'Tzion prayer that highlights God's eternal rule, the threefold concept of God's Kedusha (sanctity) is seen as a theme throughout prayer, and not a minor inclusion in three locations. On a micro level, The Kedusha itself highlights God creation, unknowable nature, and eternity, but this very threefold Kedusha as a unit, is then inserted three times in our prayers, into blessings, which refer to these three fundamentals.

Finally, there is yet a further lesson in repeating the Kedusha's threefold praises in these three blessings: we must not view God at one time as "Creator", another time as "unknowable", and yet another time, as "eternal". All three truths about God must be present...at all times. It appears this is why the Rabbis deemed it improper to recite only one aspect of this threefold praise. They must always remain as a unit, for these three ideas are the most crucial ideas concerning God.

We appreciate how the Rabbis sought to imbue man with an understanding of this Earthly reality in which we exist, commanding us to reiterate truths provable from the physical universe, and reflected by God's Torah.

Judaism is truly the only religion given by God, and therefore is completely harmonious with God's creations. Conversely, all other religions ask man to deny his mind and his senses, the very faculties God desires we put to use. ■

[1] Isaiah, 6:3

[2] Angels have no physical form, and thus, cannot speak. Therefore, our understanding of the angels "praising" God is not by means of speech, but must be some other form. For example, the heavens may be said to "praise" God. Since their magnificence attests to the Creator, we may accurately yet allegorically suggest the heavens "praise" God.

[3] Otzar Tefilos, Kedusha of Shachris; Iyun Tefila commentary: pg. 319

[4] Maimonides writes, "for natural forces and angels are identical." Further in this chapter Maimonides states that angels do have free will, and are aware. ("Guide", Book II, chap. VI)

[5] Isaiah 6:3

[6] Deut. 4:12, 4:15



the Language of Ideas Hebrew

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

We continue our theme of the Kedusha, by observing a direct parallel between the three ideas in Kedusha, and the Hebrew equivalents for each idea. Astonishingly, one, single root word conveys all three ideas of the Kedusha. A man whose name escapes me informed me of the word's three meanings.

The first idea of the Kedusha is that the entire world manifests God's wisdom. The Hebrew word for "world" is "olam." The second idea of Kedusha is that God is unknowable. The Hebrew equivalent is the same three Hebrew letters, A,L, and M (Ayin, Lamed, and Mem) which spell "alam", meaning "hidden". The third lesson of the Kedusha is that God is eternal, which in Hebrew is the word "l'Olam".

The Hebrew language thereby displays perfection, in that these ideas, which are intrinsically connected, express their intrinsic nature by sharing the same root word. How exactly are these three ideas intrinsically connected?

The idea that God is eternal, with no beginning, means that he is also the Creator. And the way God was Creator was by creating matter from nothingness, an idea our minds cannot grasp. Hence, He is thereby unknowable.

God's eternal nature defines Him as the Creator, Who is in fact, unknowable. Kedusha embodies these three ideas, as does the single word "olam". ■

Taken from "Windows to the Soul"

Covering All the Bases

RABBI MICHAEL BERNSTEIN

In order to maintain the integrity of the justice system, the Torah establishes three rules (16:19), "Do not subvert justice, do not show favoritism, nor shall you accept a bribe, for bribery blinds the eyes of the wise and corrupts the words of the just."

There are three components to every court case³⁴ the relevant law, the litigants who vie for advantage before the court and the judge who applies the case. In this one verse, the Torah, in its precise style, covers all the bases by warning against willful tampering with any of the three components.

In the first case, the Torah, in order to safeguard the integrity of the law, anticipates the possibility of a judge who questions the fairness of a commandment and decides to act in what he considers a more equitable manner. For instance, he may consider it unfair for a firstborn to get a double share of inherited property, and consequently, he may divide an estate evenly among all the heirs. Against this self-righteousness, the Torah warns the judge not to "subvert justice" by following his personal inclinations. Irrespective of them, the law must stand sacrosanct.

In the second case, the Torah safeguards the equality of the litigants by proscribing favoritism in any form. If one of the litigants is a respected community activist or a well-known scholar, the judge may be inclined to treat him with the deference due to a person of stature. Conversely, if one of the litigants is an extremely needy or unfortunate person, the judge may speak to him with especial kindness and compassion. Here, the Torah warns the judge not to "show favoritism" and thereby put the other litigant at a disadvantage.

Finally, the Torah demands the complete integrity of the judge by prohibiting payment in any shape or form, even if it is given to encourage him to rule in accordance with the law, or even if he accepts gifts from both sides simultaneously. Accepting payment of any sort, the Torah declares, obfuscates the judge's vision and corrupts his judgment.

Thus, in one concise verse, the Torah addresses and safeguards all three essential components of judicial litigation. ■

Stumbling on Stallions

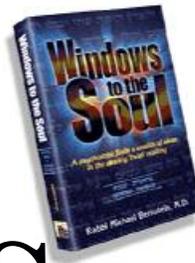
Horses were valuable in the ancient world, and it seems that Egypt had them in great abundance. In fact, the Torah restricts Jewish kings from having too many horses, because it would lead to close contact with Egypt (17:15-16). "You shall surely appoint a king over yourselves . . . only (rak) he shall not accumulate too many horses for himself, so that he will not return the people to Egypt in order to accumulate horses, for God has said to you, 'You shall not persist (lo tosfun) in returning on this road again.'"

The last words of the verse stand as a separate commandment directed to all Jews rather than to the king alone. "You shall not persist in returning on this road [to Egypt] again." The Torah forbids a Jew to live in the land of Egypt. According to the Rambam, this prohibition applies at all times, regardless of any shifts in the government, culture or ethnicity of the indigenous population.

Why should living in Egypt be forbidden if any or all of these elements have changed? What would connect the new Egypt to the old?

By forever prohibiting a return to Egypt, God has established that the return to that land, and to the ancient culture of which it is an eternal reminder, is a sign of an overall national regression. The Jewish nation was born when God chose to bring us forth to freedom from the iron crucible of Egypt; our *raison d'être* is defined by our eternal allegiance to the will of God. No nation before Egypt had ever so denied the reality of God's presence, nor would any nation afterward ever do so to such an extent. The prohibition against living in Egypt institutionalizes the idea that there is a place and belief to which we can "never go back again."

A question remains with regard to the placement of this universal prohibition. Why does the Torah present it within the context of the commandment forbidding a Jewish king to accumulate too many horses rather than as a



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separate and direct commandment to all the people?

The word "only" (rak) in the phrase "only [the king] shall not accumulate too many horses for himself" appears as a caveat, a warning to those people who expressed a desire to have a king, saying (17:14), "I will establish over me a king like all the nations that surround me." A king represents a powerful central government, with obvious advantages for efficiency, economy and safety. But, warns the Torah, there is also danger inherent in this form of government. The king may seek to accumulate stables of steeds.

What is the significance of a superabundance of horses? What danger would they pose to the welfare of the Jewish state?

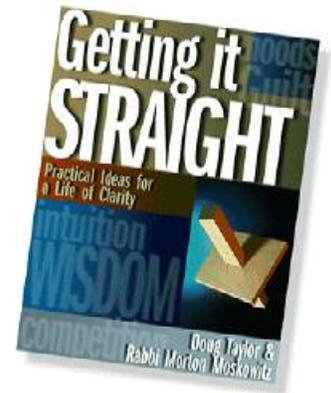
Horses in the ancient world were the ultimate weapon of war. The artillery (war chariots) and the cavalry depended on a reliable supply of powerful steeds. By warning the king not to accumulate too many horses, the Torah in effect warns him not to build an excessively large army, since doing so would draw the Jewish nation back toward Egypt and all that it represents.

The Egyptians witnessed the greatest revelation of God's mastery of the world, and yet, they remained defiant. Living in splendid isolation with the inexhaustible supply of Nile River water, the Egyptians became intoxicated with their own self-sufficiency; they could not concede to a Higher Power. A powerful standing army could have the same effect on the Jewish nation, giving rise to the illusion that security lay within their own power. While the Jewish people are meant to make reasonable efforts to protect themselves, they must never forget that true security lies in the God's hands. As Moses warned (8:11;17), "Beware lest you forget God your Lord . . . and you say in your heart, 'My power and the strength of my hand has brought me this triumph.'" An overemphasis on military preparedness can lead us down this path. Thus, the Torah simultaneously enjoins the king from seeking excessive security and also prohibits all Jewish people to return to live in Egypt.

The language at the end of the verse, "You shall not persist (lo tosfun) in returning on this road again," resonates with the language of redemption Moses used when he spoke to Pharaoh (10:29), "You have spoken correctly, I shall not persist (lo tosfif) to see your face again." Thus, the language of the prohibition against living in Egypt reminds us of the Exodus and the special destiny that arose from it. ■

Taken from "Getting it Straight"

Democracy

**DOUG TAYLOR & RABBI MORTON MOSKOWITZ**

"How was your weekend?" asked the King of Rational Thought, as he got into my car.

It was an innocent enough question for a Monday evening. Downright predictable in fact, as I drove toward the lecture we had agreed to attend. My reply, on the other hand, was near ballistic.

"It was awful," I spat out angrily. "One of the worst weekends I can ever remember."

I bitterly explained that my employer had held a so-called "team-building" retreat Friday and Saturday. The idea was to get all the employees together and figure out better ways to market our services. It sounded like a great idea.

But it turned into a nightmare. Rather than focusing on positive things that could be done by working together, people started complaining. One group thought another group got too many privileges. A third group thought others didn't work hard enough. People who

had landed few, if any, new clients griped about the salary levels of the people who did. For my part, I had busted my tail for the entire year, working more hours than anyone. Yet all I got was criticism because the company had, years ago, provided me with a cellular phone. On and on it went. Rather than setting boundaries and limits, the moderator - an outsider - let it go from bad to worse. The meeting finally ended in a huge verbal fight between departments, with no resolution.

"The decline to democracy," said the King of Rational Thought quietly after I stopped venting.

"What?" I asked, surprised.

"I mean, it sounds like your company has taken that most treacherous of turns; the decline into democracy."

"I don't follow you," I said, slowing for a stoplight. "You make it sound like democracy is a bad thing."

"Tell you what," he said. "Can I ask you a question?"

"Sure."

"Suppose a nuclear power plant has a problem; a serious problem that could lead to a melt-down. But they've had some warning. They have one hour to make a decision about what action to take. Which do you think would be the best approach? To gather the entire power plant staff, from engineers to security guards to janitors, and vote on a plan of action,

with each person getting an equal vote? Or do you think it would be better to turn the problem over to the senior nuclear engineers and let them decide what to do?"

I rounded a corner and entered the freeway. "Well, that's pretty simple," I replied. "You'd let the senior engineers decide."

"Why?"

"Because they're the ones who really understand how the power plant -"

I stopped in mid-sentence as I saw the implication of what he was saying.

"Operates," he finished. "They're also the ones in the best position to fix it. So, what's the difference between a company like yours and a nuclear power plant? Is the mail room clerk really as qualified as the president to decide what direction the company should go? Does a rookie employee fresh out of school really have the experience, wisdom, and knowledge to tell a senior staff member how things should be done?"

"You see," he continued, "it's in vogue these days to think that everyone's opinion should carry equal weight, regardless of its merit. But that assumes that one person is just as wise and knowledgeable as another, which clearly is not true. Just as you wouldn't entrust the nuclear power plant problem to a vote of the staff, so should you not do the same with a business or, for that matter, a country. Running businesses and countries is not about doing what's popular. It's about making wise and intelligent decisions. Of course, the success of such a system, in government or in business, depends on having people at the helm who meet those qualifications."

Traffic began to slow.

"What do you think?" I asked, gesturing to the sea of tail lights ahead. "Should we get off at the next exit and take surface streets?"

The King of Rational Thought smiled.

"Want to vote on it?" he asked. ■

the nation. This Kohen and the other officers of the nation address the people before they enter into battle. This pasuk introduces the section of the Torah that discusses the address that this Kohen and the officers deliver to the nation. This section can be summarized in three points. First, it is prohibited to be fearful of the enemy. Second, a special Kohen is appointed to accompany and address the nation before battle. Third, the Kohen and the officers instruct the nation to not be fearful but they then enumerate those individuals that are permitted to leave before the battle is joined.

The elements of this section seem disjointed and even contradictory. The section begins with an injunction against fearing the enemy. Maimonides and others maintain that this injunction is one of the 613 mitzvot of the Torah.[1] The section then provides the text of the address that the Kohen and the officers deliver to the nation. The address begins with instructions to not be fearful. Next, the people are provided with a list of individuals who are permitted to leave before the battle is joined. There are three individuals included on this list – a person who has recently planted a vineyard, betrothed a woman, or built a home. The address ends by instructing a person who is fearful to leave. This is preferable to fleeing and discouraging those around him.

We would expect the address of the Kohen and the officers to express the initial theme of the section – the prohibition against fearing the enemy. Indeed, the address begins with this theme. But the address continues with a list of individuals who are exempt from battle. How do these exemptions relate to the injunction against being fearful? The address ends with an instruction to those who are fearful. These individuals are told to leave. This seems to directly contradict the requirement to not be fearful!

“And the officers continue to speak to the nation and they say, “Who is afraid and weak-hearted? He should go and return to his home and not weaken the hearts of his brothers – as his heart is weakened.” Devarim (20:8)

The above passage is the text of the final element of the address delivered to the people. The pasuk provides an answer to our last question. We are commanded not to be fearful. But it is inevitable that some individuals will not be capable of eliminating or suppressing their natural anxiety. These individuals are required to leave in order to not undermine the courage of others. In other words, the very requirement to not be fearful, demands that those who cannot control their anxiety leave. Rather than contradicting the initial theme, this last element of the address reflects the injunction against being

fearful. However, the Torah provides no clear indication as to the reason that one who has planted a vineyard, newly betrothed a wife, or recently built a home is exempted from battle.

“And the officers should speak to the nation and say, “Who has built a new home and not initiated it? He should go and return to his home – lest he die in war and another man initiate it.” (Devarim 20:5)

Rabbaynu Avraham Ibn Ezra and many other commentaries discuss this issue. Most conclude that these individuals are most likely to flee the battle. This person is poised to enter an exciting period of his life. He has a promising future before him. He deeply desires to live to enjoy his future. These people are – as a group – the most likely individuals to flee. Of course, in fleeing they will undermine the courage of others. Therefore, they are invited to leave before the battle begins.[2]

This solves an interesting problem in the above passage. The pasuk contains a portion of the text of the address of the Kohen and the officers. This portion of the text outlines the exemption for a person who has recently built a home. The pasuk explains that this person is exempt from participating in the battle. But the pasuk includes an interesting phrase – lest he die in war and another man initiate it. This phrase reflects the reason for the exemption. He is likely to be focused on the home he has not yet enjoyed. He may not be willing to risk his future in this new home. It is preferable for this person to leave before the battle to his fleeing once the battle begins. However, the pasuk adds, “and another man initiate it.” What is the significance of this final consideration? Why is it important that if this person dies, another person will initiate his home?

Rashi provides a response to this question. He explains that this would be source of severe grief.[3] Gur Aryeh explains the meaning of Rashi’s comment. He explains that this phrase suggest another reason that for this person’s exemption. A person who has built a home and not yet lived in it has two reasons for concern. First, his premature death in battle would deprive him of the opportunity to enjoy the home he labored to build. Second, he may die in battle and some stranger will enjoy the home that he labored to build. In other words, someone other than himself will enjoy the benefit of all of his efforts. For some people, this second concern is even greater than the first. This person can accept that he may not enjoy the home he built. But he cannot accept that someone else will enjoy it in his stead![4]

Maimonides offers an additional insight into these exemptions. He begins with a problem. We

are commended to not be afraid when we go into battle. How are we to avoid or suppress this fear? Maimonides explains that we must focus on two issues. First, we are to rely on Hashem to save us. Second, we must recognize that in any battle, we are fighting against a nation that opposes Bnai Yisrael and seeks to harm Hashem’s nation. In engaging in this battle we are fighting for Hashem to defeat those who seek to oppose Him. In other words, when engaged in battle, we should interpret our role as an act of service to Hashem. Maimonides implies that if a person can succeed in achieving this focus and state on consciousness, he will not be fearful. Maimonides adds that the two areas of focus are related. We hope to be saved through providence. We can only enjoy this providence if our intentions are to serve Hashem and are pure.[5]

Maimonides observes that in order to achieve the state of consciousness that he describes, one cannot be distracted by thoughts or concerns regarding his family. This observation suggests a deeper understanding of the exemptions outlined in our parasha. A person who has built a new home, recently betrothed, or planted a vineyard is easily distracted by anxiety over these new endeavors. This person faces powerful psychological impediments that may prevent achieving the state of consciousness that is required. It follows that these individuals are exempt from participating in the battle.

It is clear from this discussion that this section of the Torah is not disjointed or contradictory. The section is consistent and focuses on a single theme – we are prohibited to fear our enemy. The entire address of the Kohen and the officers is designed to assure the achievement of this goal. They begin with an admonishment against fearing the enemy. They then exempt various categories of individuals that are likely to become distracted from the objectives of the battle or be overcome with anxiety over their own safety. These people are invited to leave, rather than possibly flee and undermine the confidence of their fellow brothers.

Understanding that the entire section expresses a single theme, helps resolve a problem in halacha. There are two types of war in halacha – milchemet mitzvah and milchemet reshut. A precise delineation of the difference between these two types of wars requires an involved analysis. For the purposes of this discussion a working definition will suffice. Milchemet mitzvah is a war that is required in order to fulfill a mitzvah of the Torah. A milchemet reshut is not specifically required by a commandment in the Torah.

According to many authorities, this section of the Torah only fully applies to a milchemet reshut. These authorities explain that everyone is required to participate in a milchemet mitzvah. There are no exemptions. Therefore, prior to a

(Shoftim continued from page 8)

milchemet mitzvah the Kohen and the officers do not enumerate those that are permitted to decline involvement. No one has such an option. Everyone must participate.[6] Kesef Mishne argues that although the exemptions would not be enumerated prior to a milchemet mitzvah, a Kohen is appointed to address the nation. He does not list exemptions but he does admonish the nation to not fear its enemy.[7]

However, it seems that Maimonides disagrees. He explains that before both types of conflicts – milchemet mitzvah and milchemet reshut – a Kohen is appointed. He describes the address that the Kohen and the officers deliver. The description includes an enumeration of the exemptions. He does not distinguish between a milchemet mitzvah and a milchemet reshut. Clearly, Maimonides is implying – if not openly stating – that the entire section applies to both a milchemet reshut and a milchemet mitzvah. He maintains that in both cases the exemptions are enumerated.[8]

However, Maimonides does agree that the exemptions do not extend to a milchemet mitzvah. Only in the instance of a milchemet reshut do these exemptions apply.[9] Of course, it seems that Maimonides' position is self-contradictory. He maintains that the exemptions only apply to a milchemet reshut. Yet, he asserts that the Kohen and the officers review the exemptions before any battle – even a milchemet mitzvah. Why would the Kohen and the officers review the exemptions prior to a milchemet mitzvah. They do not apply?

“And when they approach the battle, the Kohen should come near and speak to the nation.” (Devarim 20:2)

Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik Z"l suggests a novel solution to this problem. His solution is based on a requirement outlined in the mishne and quoted by Rashi. According to the mishne, the Kohen is required to address the nation in Lashon HaKodesh – in Hebrew.[10] This is a strange requirement. It seems that the responsibility of the Kohen and officers is to communicate a clear message to the warriors about to enter battle. They should use the language that will be most easily understood. This seems to be a strange instance in which to require use of Lashon HaKodesh.

Rav Soloveitchik suggests that the Kohen and the officers do not discharge their duty by merely addressing the nation. They are required to read this section of the Torah to the nation. In order to fulfill this obligation, they must read the section in Lashon HaKodesh. If they were to design their own presentation that thematically matched this section, they would not fulfill their obligation of reading this section to the nation. Similarly, if



they used a language other than Lashon HaKodesh they would not be reading the nation this section. They would be delivering a translation to the nation.

Based on this observation, Rav Soloveitchik explains Maimonides' position. Before every war the Kohen and the officers are required to address the nation. In the instance of a milchemet reshut all elements of the address described in our section are relevant. It is important to admonish the nation to not be fearful and to communicate the exemptions. In the instance of the milchemet mitzvah the exemptions are not relevant; everyone is required to participate. But the admonition against fearfulness is appropriate. Nonetheless, even in the instance of a milchemet mitzvah, the entire text of the address is presented. Rav Soloveitchik explains that this is because the Kohen and the officers are not permitted to improvise their own address. They are not even permitted to translate the words of the Torah into another language. They are required to address the nation by means of reading the exact text of our section. It is true that in the instance of a milchemet mitzvah, the exemptions are not relevant. But they are a part of the section. The section can only be accurately read to the nation if it is recited accurately and in its entirety.[11]

There are two obvious problems posed by Rav Soloveitchik's solution. First, why must the Kohen and officers address the nation through reading this section of the Torah? Why are they not permitted to use this section as a general outline and construct their own appropriate address? Second, even if we can explain the reason for this restriction against improvising,

why read the whole section? It would seem to make more sense to require that only the initial, relevant passage be read!

Let us begin with this last question. According to our analysis above, this section is not composed of separate unrelated elements. The entire section revolves around a single issue. It is prohibited to fear the enemy. The exemptions also reflect this theme. Therefore, although the exemptions are not relevant to a milchemet mitzvah, they are an integral part of the message of the section. Therefore, the section can only be accurately read through reading all of the passages.

“For Hashem your G-d goes before you to do battle on your behalf with your enemies and to save you.” (Devarim 20:4)

But why are the Kohen and officers not permitted to improvise? Perhaps, the answer lies in the above passage. The Kohen and the officers do not merely tell the nation to not be fearful. They offer a reason. The nation is not relying on its own strength in this confrontation with its enemy. Hashem battles for His people. Hashem will protect and rescue Bnai Yisrael. This message can only have its full impact if it is read from the Torah. It is not adequate for the Kohen and the officers to deliver their own assurances and admonition to the nation. They are required to communicate to the nation the promise and related admonition of the Torah. They can best communicate the message of the Torah through reading it directly. Therefore, they cannot improvise. An improvised address is not a direct expression of the Torah's promise and related admonition. They must present – in the most direct manner – the message of the Torah. This can only be accomplished through reading the section. And because the section is a single integrated set of passages, it must be read in its entirety – even in the instance of a milchemet mitzvah. ■

[1] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Sefer HaMitzvot, Mitzvat Lo Ta' Aseh 58.

[2] Rabbaynu Avraham ibn Ezra, Commentary on Sefer Devarim 20:5.

[3] Rabbaynu Shlomo ben Yitzchak (Rashi), Commentary on Sefer Devarim 20:5.

[4] Rav Yehuda Loew of Prague (Maharal), Aryeh Commentary on Sefer Devarim 20:9.

[5] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Mishne Torah, Hilchot Melachim 7:14.

[6] Rabbaynu Avraham ben David of Posquieres (Ra'avad) Critique on Maimonides' Mishne Torah, Hilchot Melachim 7:1.

[7] Rav Yosef Karo, Kesef Mishne, Hilchot Melachim 7:1.

[8] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Mishne Torah, Hilchot Melachim 7:1-4.

[9] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Mishne Torah, Hilchot Melachim 7:4.

[10] Mesechet Sotah 42:a

[11] Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik, Kobetz Chidushai Torah.

PROPHETS

vs Magicians

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

suffer from this. As it says, "Face to face do I speak to him as a person speaks to his friend". And even though this is the greatest connection to G-d, still he did not suffer.

4) All other prophets could not receive prophecy at their will – but only when G-d desired. Some would go days or months without prophecy. Even if they wanted or needed something, sometimes it would be days or months or years, or even never, that they would be told. Some would have people play music to put them in a good mood such as Elisha. But Moshe peace be upon him received prophecy whenever he wanted as it says, "Stand here and listen to what G-d will tell you what to do" and "G-d said to Moshe tell Aaron your brother that he can not come to the holy of holies at any time [he wants]". Our rabbi said, "Aaron was prohibited to come whenever he wanted, but not Moshe.

Reader: You write that Israel did not believe Moses because of the miracles he displayed.

Mesora: "Israel did not believe Moses because of the miracles", is a quote from Maimonides.

Reader: In fact, you disparage the concept of a warlock in general. On the other hand, one of the tests a prophet has to pass in order to be accepted is the prediction of the future - exactly the type of miracle being performed in many of the stories, some having been corroborated, that people have written to you about. Yet when people write you about that, you respond with Maimonides' criticism of astrology.

Mesora: Let me first say that today's astrology is not divine, it is man's invention, as opposed to prophecy which is G-d's Divine, informative gift. If I am clear, what you are asking is how a warlock is of no validation, yet a true prophet who predicts future events is accepted, and even warranted. It is a good question.

I would make this distinction; a warlock and one who accurately predicts the future are doing two qualitatively different acts. The prophet who forecasts events - all of which come true in fine detail - demonstrates a perfection in the realm of knowledge, and only attainable by G-d's Will. This validates him, as operating in line with the Creator. Additionally, he is not spoken of in the Torah as one who derails another from following the Torah, as opposed to one who performs tricks

in order to cause others to defect from Judaism. Here alone we see why G-d tells us not to follow the "baal mofes", the warlock. He is speaking against the Torah. Here, G-d teaches that when a warlock and Torah come into conflict, the Torah is always to be followed. Torah is the absolute truth. (Saadia Gaon dismisses all the signs of Pharaoh's magicians as merely slight of hand.)

To reiterate, only a true prophet can forecast the future with 100% accuracy. This is because one who is not a prophet, has no means by which to forecast. A human being has but five senses, and no others. Therefore, he has the future closed off to him. He is as a blind man is to vision. For this very reason, that knowledge of the future is unavailable without prophecy, does the Torah validate one as a prophet when his forecast comes true with 100% accuracy, to the finest detail. Only in such a case do we know that he must have been informed via prophecy.

Why then isn't a forecast of 50% accurate enough? He has in fact forecasted something properly! The answer why we require 100% accuracy is simple: a person may make guesses, and reality may coincidentally parallel one's guess. This can and does happen. This is how warlocks attracted people. If they say enough generalities about the future, a few are bound to be somewhat similar to events that eventually happen. Followers of warlocks and fortunetellers are emotionally driven, and latch on to any small statements the warlock makes, if it smacks of similarity to reality. But these followers don't realize that there is such a thing as coincidence. They view coincidental phenomena as actual forecasts, which have come true. The Torah tells us how we verify a true prophet; ALL predictions must come to be. If even one detail is not realized, he is a false prophet, and is killed. (Deut. 18:20)

One might ask, "what if an accurate predictor of events tells us to follow idolatry? Do we then follow him, as he predicted future events accurately, is he now completely validated by his forecast?" The answer is that one who forecasts accurately, will never oppose the Torah. Why? It is because his forecast demonstrates that he is receiving knowledge from G-d, and G-d will never give a true forecast that one opposes Torah. This is the case, as G-d instructs us that one who forecasts with 100% accuracy must be accepted by Torah standards. "Torah standards", not idolatrous standards. ■

Reader: What exactly is the difference between Moses and any of the other prophets?

Mesora: See Maimonides 13 Principles, Principle VII. Moses (Moshe) differed in four manners:

1) All other prophets G-d spoke to them through intermediaries. By Moshe it was without one, as it says, "face to face I spoke to him".

2) Regarding all other prophets, prophecy came to them at night while they were asleep in a dream as it says "in a dream of the night" and other such references; or in the day but only after a deep sleep-like state came over them, and all their senses were shut off except their thoughts. Not so by Moshe. Moshe would receive a prophecy any time when he would stand between the two figures on the ark as G-d attests to it, "and I will make it known to you there" and "not so my servant Moshe. Face to face I speak to him."

3) When a prophet would receive prophecy he would not be able to stand the intense effect and he would shake and not be able to stand. As it relates regarding Daniel in his encounter with the angel Gabriel. Regarding Moshe, he did not