



"If you search for it like silver, and seek it like buried treasures, then will you comprehend knowledge of God, and the fear of God will you find."

King Solomon, Proverbs 2:4-5

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The Quail

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

In Numbers, 11:4, we read that the mixed multitude who attached themselves to the Jewish Exodus, committed a sin when they lusted. They cried out, "who will feed us meat?" Even the Jews joined them. They cried, "we remember the fish we ate in Egypt for free", and they recalled other delicacies. In passage 6 they state, "And now our souls are dried, all we see is the manna." (Interesting is the following, detailed, positive qualities of the manna. Rashi states this description is God's, contrasting the previous complaint of the people.) The account continues with a description of Moshe hearing the people "crying by the household". Rashi states they were crying for the matters of "households", referring to the newly received (Torah) sexual prohibitions of family members. There are many facets to this story. I will focus herein on how God addresses their cry for meat.

In passage 11:13, Moshe says: "Where shall I get meat to give to this entire people that cry upon me, saying, give us meat that we may eat?"

God says: (18) "Ready yourselves tomorrow, and you will eat meat, because you cry in the ears of God saying, 'who will feed us meat, because it was better for us in Egypt', God will give you meat and you will eat. (19) Not one day will you eat, nor two days, nor five days, nor ten days, nor twenty days. (20) Until thirty days, until it comes out of your noses, and it be a vile thing, on account that you despised God Who was in your midst and you cried before Him saying 'why have we come out of Egypt.'" (21) Moshe responds: "600,000 by foot that I am amidst, and You say 'I will give meat to them and they will eat 30 days?' (22) If the sheep and cattle be slaughtered, would there be found sufficient? If all the fish of the sea be gathered, would

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Yisro

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

Upon the Jews' initial entrance into Israel, Moshe addresses his father in law as follows: (Numbers, 10:29)

(29) "Moshe said to Chovav, son of Reuale the Midianite, father in law of Moshe, 'we are traveling to the place, upon which God said I will give it to you....Go with us and there will be done good to you, as God has spoken good for Israel. (30) Chovav said to Moshe, 'I will not go, unto my land and my birthplace I will go'. (31) Moshe said, 'please do not forsake us in as much as you know our travels in the desert, and you will be to us as eyes. (32) And when you go with us, that good which God will do unto us, He will do unto you.'

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The World is Very Good

RIVKA OLENICK

"The Almighty saw all that He had made and behold, it was very good." Genesis 1:31

God created the world and nothing was lacking. Not only was the world good, it was "very good." Vhenay tov mod. Mankind still has everything that is "very good" in order to be satisfied. One who truly understands the goodness that exists in the world is always satisfied, because God made it "easy" for everyone to thrive in the world. The phenomena of the created world, is incredible and infinitely good. The air, and the water are plentiful. The sun, the wind, and the rain that are needed to make crops grow so that we have food are also plentiful. There are great resources in the earth such as wood, coal, and petroleum that allow industry to grow, which people utilize. The mountains, the oceans, the moon and stars were created for our enjoyment, a gift! The ability that our body can move, and our eyes can see. Shouldn't we view all this as "very good?" What about the ability to hear, speak, and think? Isn't this also "very good?" Do we appreciate what we have only when we see someone else who doesn't have - the ability to walk or hear or see? Don't we take all of this for granted? We do. If we didn't take all this for granted, we would appreciate the continued kindness of the Creator and the awesomeness of the created world. It was all given to us for our enjoyment and benefit and we should continue to see this as "very good." If we lack the appreciation for what is "very good," then we can never be grateful to God. Why shouldn't we be grateful to the One Who created us, Who is perfect and Who's ways are perfect.

Man looks for new ways to claim that what ever he makes he is the creator of, and that he must leave his "mark." We spend endless energy, an entire lifetime figuring out how we can be the "creator" of something exclusively ours. And we think that the world is "not good" until we have

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Yisro

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

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Why was Moshe addressing his father in law at this time? Did Moshe sense in Chovav some hesitation to remain with the people of Israel? What was Moshe's initial argument, and why did he mention Chovav's role of being a navigator only in passage 31? This was not stated by Moshe in his initial argument. What does Chovav's response about "my land and my birthplace" come to teach us? Why mention Chovav as "son of Reuale the Midianite"? We already know who he is.

From Moshe's first statement in passage 29, we understand that Moshe desired Chovav to enjoy the best life, "Go with us and there will be done good to you, as God has spoken good for Israel." Chovav responds, "I will not go, unto my land and my birthplace I will go". Moshe understands from this response that Chovav's attachment to his land and birthplace outweigh his wish to relocate to Israel, receiving the good from God. (The passage itself in describing Chovav states, "Chovav, son of Reuale the Midianite", hinting at Chovav's attachment to his father and his land.) Moshe then tries to use Chovav's own mode of operation to attract him: Chovav was a leader in Midian. He also demonstrated leadership by suggesting a system of judges in parshas Yisro (Yisro and Chovav are the same according to many commentators). It appears that Moshe intended to attract Chovav to the ultimate good promised by God, by also appealing to Chovav's own motivations displayed in "unto my land and my birthplace I will go". "and you will be to us as eyes" was Moshe's attempt to do so.

Moshe did not initially suggest that Chovav take on some leadership role by being their eyes. Moshe wanted to attract Chovav to the good life, based on the good life itself. When Moshe saw this was not attractive enough, he sought to add a motive for Chovav, so Moshe mentioned that he would be as eyes to the nation, a leadership role. But Moshe being committed to the truth, would not allow this to be the sole argument for Chovav's attachment to Israel. This is why Moshe again adds - even in his second argument - that Chovav will attain the good promised by God. To Moshe, this must always be the motive for following Judaism - it is the ultimate good. No other consideration replaces this as an argument to follow Judaism. □

Punishment

Reader1: My question is, what is Judaism's view on reward and punishment in this world as it relates to personal, Divine providence? Meaning to say that if I do something wrong should I be concerned that God will then punish me for that wrong in this world? Does God in general do this?

Answer: According to Rambam, one must be on a level to receive punishment. Rambam quoted King David when King David was referring to the other nations, he said, "c'vamos nidmu", "they are equal to animals". Meaning, just as animals have no providence, so do those who have no God.

Also, it is written, "aise asher Hashem ohave, yochiach", "who ever G-d loves, He rebukes". Meaning, if one is honestly striving for the right life, G-d will steer him from the wrong way, and that is what we mean by punishment. We can term punishment more accurately as a "corrective measure."

Reader2: "If the punishment associated with the violation of a particular commandment must be carried out no matter what, then what purpose does repentance serve?"

Mesora: The one positive effect of death for the one being slain is his atonement. Prior to his death, repentance by the individual is to correct his values and perfect his soul, but he still must be slain to uphold the system and instill fear in society. The Torah says that you kill so and so and then describes the societal benefit of the slain's death acting as a deterrent, "v'lo yzidoon ode" , "the people will not again sin". (Deut. 17:13)

Ezekiel Chapter 18, G-d completely forgives one who repents fully, even to the point that G-d will deter his timely death due to his new found perfection. However, perfection of the person does not warrant the courts to alter the halachik system. What is in man's (the courts) obligation to exercise must be meted out in accordance with Jewish law. G-d on the other hand will alter nature for the one who fully repents. G-d will even protect him from disasters, but G-d will not alter the system which is His desire to be fulfilled by man.

Complete repentance therefore assures us of G-d's complete protection from evils which arise due to nature, and the course of the world. But it does not cause the courts to abandon their following of the justice system. □

The Spies' Plague

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

Rashi in parshas Shilach (Num. 14:37) brings down an odd medrash describing the punishment of the 10 evil spies who spoke against the land of Israel right before they were about to inherit it. Rashi states, "With that death suitable for them, measure for measure. They sinned with their tongue, (so) their tongues were extended to their navels and worms exited their tongues and entered their navels....."

To understand this medrash, you must first define what "tongue", "navel" and "worms" represent. We see clearly that Rashi says they sinned with their tongues - their sin was speaking evil. So tongue represents talk. But what do navel and worms represent? A persons navel has a singular mark of distinction over all other parts of the body - it is the supplier of sustenance while in the womb. What do worms represent? They represent lowliness and that which one abhors. Something disgusting. Matching the meaning of these objects to their representation, we can interpret the medrash as follows: The spies caused something disgusting (evil speech) to exit their tongues and infect that which gives them sustenance - that is, the land of Israel. Israel was to be a situation where G-d provided food for the Jewish nation, besides being their homeland. The spies' tongues foolishly iterated their insecurities and destroyed their chance to gain this source of sustenance. □

The World is Very Good

RIVKA OLENICK

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made our specific contribution, then the world is "good." Isn't this true? We are willing to put up with an awesome amount of frustration until we fulfill our "dream." "If I could just attain this, I would be satisfied with my life..." However, it's God that is always supplying us with our needs and Who allows us to be satisfied. Don't we have enough of what we really need? Do we "thank God" only when something goes our way? When something works out well for us do we believe it was our own doing? We do. Most of the time we don't even think about God with regard to real

gratitude. When things don't work out for us we blame God and say "why me?" We do this because we don't have enough appreciation for what God has already given us, the "very good" that we're able to obtain all the time. We're trapped, by the constant need to look for the next "good." We fool ourselves instead of working on ourselves.

The Jewish people have a very specific purpose in the world, as the teachers of Torah, the example that the rest of the world needs to observe. The way we should be observed by non-Jews is through the commandments, and through Torah study and by encouraging and helping others to pursue knowledge and truth. As it says, "ki hi chachmaschem u'vinaschem b'aynay haamim", "For it (Torah wisdom) is your wisdom and your understanding in the eyes of the peoples." We are so fortunate that God has allowed the Mesora to continue, and that too is "very good." Many great Torah scholars emerged because they were focused on the "very good." They used all their intellectual resources to be involved in thought and understood clearly that a person's true happiness is really and only in a person's mind.

We should do everything possible to break free from the false ideas of what we think is "very good" and try to have a greater appreciation for what already exists and is "very good." By living a simpler life that is more in line with our true purpose. Be grateful for what you already have, not what you are missing. If you do this you'll see that you have so much - more than you realize. Write a list of all the things you have overlooked appreciating and you will realize how selfish you have been in this area. You will immediately see that everything you already have is "very good" and now is the time to pursue the "very good" that is called knowledge!"

"He considered each in its connection with the whole, v'henny tov m'od. Good, there too where we should not have expected it, where looked at separately by one who does not see the whole, it would appear imperfect. Thus everything created everything in existence, looked at in connection with everything else, is "very good." From Horeb, Samson Raphael Hirsch.

"Remember what I said in this chapter and consider it, and you will understand all that the Prophets and our Sages remarked about the perfect goodness of all the direct works of God." From the Rambam, Guide for the Perplexed page 267, Chapter 10. □

The Quail

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

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□
there be sufficient?" What an amazing response Moshe uttered! God says, "God will give you meat and you will eat"... "Until thirty days", and Moshe questions this! Didn't Moshe see God's miracles first hand? In light of God's abilities displayed via the Ten Plagues, what can possibly be questionable to Moshe regarding God's promise to provide meat for thirty days? God's response to Moshe emphasizes this point, "Is God's hand short? You will see if this occurs." This rare type of response requires understanding.

Let us list the questions:

1)What is meant by "Who" will feed us meat?

2)What was the Jews' complaint - why pick on the manna if in reality it was good?

3)Why respond to their request and feed them quail - they seem to be in the wrong?

4)What is meant that they ate fish "free"? Rashi says (11:5) "even straw was not given to them free, how then fish?"

5)What is the purpose of "Until the quail exits your noses"? Who is making it come out of their nostrils?

6)Rashi (11:10) on "crying by the household" states "they cried for the sexual prohibitions on family members." How does this relate to our story?

7)On "K'misson'nim" Rashi (11:2) states "they were seeking a pretense to escape from following God." The question is why they needed to escape, and why at this time?

8)What is Moshe's argument about the cattle and fish being insufficient?

9)What is God's response to Moshe, "Hayad Hashem tiksar", "Is God's hand short"?

As a first step to answering these questions, I will note that many times we remain ignorant of truths due to our own, incorrect assumptions. We must be sensitive, not to overlook, assume, or project. We must focus on the Torah's words which are an exact science. The Torah's content and words lead us to the questions, and it answers those very issues. This very idea is derived from these verses stated by King Solomon:

"If you dig for it like silver, and search it out like a buried treasure, then you will understand the fear of G-d, and the knowledge of G-d will you find. Because God gives wisdom, from His mouth come knowledge and understanding." (Proverbs, 2:4-6).

What is meant by the two statements in this passage, "Because God gives wisdom, from His mouth come knowledge and understanding"? It teaches a fine point - two reasons Torah will yield great insights into truths: 1) "God gives wisdom", meaning, the Source of our studies is God - an infinitely wise Creator. This is one reason why we must dig for knowledge with such vigor. Our outlook must be, "there is tremendous knowledge to behold". A sense of adventure must overcome us as we part from daily affairs and step into the endless sea of enlightening thought and ideas. This sense must present itself when each day, we embark upon new studies. 2) The second idea derived from this passage; Not only is the Source of wisdom remarkable, but the actual structure of each passage is a great study in itself. This is what is meant by "from His mouth...", meaning, God's articulated words and verses are of the utmost precision. Only a refined sensitivity will drive a Torah student to examine the Torah with such exactitude, thereby uncovering deeper ideas. Let us return to the topic.

What did the Jews say? "Who" will feed us meat. Why was this joined with a ridicule of the manna? The first idea we notice is the Jews' degradation of God. They saw all the miracles, and yet said, "Who will give us meat?" Another later passage alerts us that they directed this statement of "Who" at God, as 11:20 reads, "(God said)...on account that you despised God Who was in your midst and you cried before Him saying 'why have we come out of Egypt.' Here, God identifies their crime as an act of degrading God. But why were they despising Him now? They recalled the "free" fish eaten in Egypt, which Rashi denies was factual. Rashi is teaching us that they meant free in another sense, that is, free from Mitzvos. A picture starts to emerge. We begin to witness not only an attack on God, but on the Torah system.

The core issue borne out is the Jews' aversion to the Torah - a new, binding, and prohibitive demand on their formerly "free" lifestyle, albeit as slaves. They remembered (imagined) the fish they ate "free" of commandments. The Jews rebelled against the Giver of this Torah, but they could not do so directly, as they only said, "Who" will give us meat. Therefore God clearly identifies for the Jews, that it was God Who they despised.

Why did they attack the manna? The answer is "displacement". When someone cannot vent his emotion on the real object, he directs his emotion towards a replacement. Such was the case with the ridicule of the manna. The

Jews really disliked the Torah system, but their eyes saw the event at Sinai, and they could not deny reality - the Torah is true, God is real. Therefore, they selected that which represented God's system, the manna, which He provided miraculously. They vented themselves towards it, instead of towards the divine commands. They said "we want meat", meaning, we don't want this manna. In truth, they had no problem with the manna. The passages teach us how great it was. What they meant to say is "we don't want the Torah". This is what Rashi again alludes to when he explains "crying by the household". Rashi stated they were "crying about the matters of the household", they wished to once again have relations with those now prohibited by Torah law. Rashi (11:2) states "they were seeking a pretense to escape from following God."

Let's also be mindful of a strange statement. Moshe said, if all the sheep, cattle, and fish were supplied to the Jews, there wouldn't be sufficient. This is impossible! There were only 3 million Jews, and the entire oceanic population most assuredly would feed them forever. How can Moshe say this? Examine God's resolve: God says He will comply with the Jews' request, and provide quail for 30 days, until it exits their nostrils. Why comply? The Jews' were in error. God said so, "you despised God Who was in your midst." I ask you, the reader, to now stop, and think about this following question: What reason can there be for compliance with an improper request? Imagine you are faced with a scenario, and you comply. What grounds would there be for compliance? (Keep in mind, compliance means you prefer another recourse.) Don't read further, think for a moment.

What are the possibilities? Either there are, or there aren't alternatives. If there are none, one may comply because he has no other alternative, or cannot think of one right now. However, these explanations cannot apply to God. If there are alternatives, compliance is not needed. But there is one reason compliance may be engaged,...not so much to give the person his request, but perhaps for an ulterior motive.

God in no way intended that the quail satisfy the Jews' desire for meat as an end in itself. Moshe too understood that the issue was not a problem with food. In his wisdom, Moshe knew they were rebelling against God. This is what caused Moshe to respond to God's promise of quail as he did. Moshe was not doubting that God could provide any amount of food. What Moshe meant was, "food is not the answer". Moshe knew the oceans contained enough - enough that is, if food is the issue. But

the oceans cannot be sufficient if the problem is a rebellion against God. Moshe was asking of God, "food is not the issue, so why give them quail?"

What God in fact was doing, was complying for an ulterior purpose. That is, that the Jews should see for themselves that their complaint for meat is a misdirected attack on God. The only way for them to realize this, is looking past their lust for meat. Only after they realize their attachment to meat is an unnatural one, will they be able to stop, reflect, and recognize their problem is really with God, and the Torah they wish to abandon. This is why God says the quail will exit their nostrils. Not that God is the cause of this, but that their own unnatural desire for meat would propel them into an eating frenzy. As they would feed, their real, underlying emotion would not be satisfied, that being the removal of their new, Torah obligations. They would then keep eating under the false impression that meat is the issue. This was God's plan. To move them past their blinding emotion that meat is their problem. Sforno actually says the same thing: (11:23) "Is God's hand incapable of finding a method for them to despise all foods?" "They will eat the meat with their own free will, even after the enjoyment is gone, until it exists their nostrils, and they will despise it without any control on their free will at all, and thereby they will repent with a repentance of love..." God saw that the only way to show the Jews their true mistake, was to first show them that their assumed complaint was baseless.

Moshe said to God, "600,000 by foot that I am amidst, and You say 'I will give meat to them and they will eat 30 days?' If the sheep and cattle be slaughtered, would there be found sufficient? If all the fish of the sea be gathered, would there be sufficient?" God responds, "Is the hand of God short?" What was Moshe's mistake which demanded this response? It would seem that Moshe was not of the opinion that the method of addressing the Jews' error was to satisfy the displaced emotion. Moshe felt that the method must be to address the true, underlying emotion - their wish to abandon the commandments. Why didn't God choose this approach? We may suggest that such an approach would end in the Jews' denial.

I tread in heavy waters here, I may err, but yet I wonder what was Moshe's equation. Did he not see this point, that there are times when a direct assault on an emotion will not be fruitful. Did Moshe feel this case was different than all others? That an open attack on the very emotion to abandon God would be fatal? This point requires further study.



WHY ADAM'S FATE IS OURS

Reader: How is it fair that all humanity suffer for Adam's and Eve's mistakes? Even if you say it was still during the days of creation -why don't we get a shot at immortality without the resurrection deal? Doesn't seem quite fair, and G-d is fair?

Mesora: Good question. The reason we "suffer" Adam's fate is not a punishment for something we didn't do. In as much as we are the same design as Adam, we therefore require the same rectification as Adam. Adam demonstrated that he ("he" as in all mankind) could not exist in the pristine form in which God created him. He represented all mankind, not just himself. God's correction in his nature is in reality a correction not just for Adam, but for all man. God did not change Adam. God changed man. □

The Style of the Torah

Reader: Why does the torah not say things in a 'strait' fashion - always beating around the bush, saying generalities and then contradicting itself somewhere else - or worse, giving 2 versions of the same account, ie man was created as male female or a male and then a female - and if you say first a male-female and then split, etc.

Why can the torah just say that in plain Hebrew? Why all the cover-up that can throw people off?

Mesora: This is the method of the Torah - to draw the student's attention by raising questions through inconsistencies. As the student investigates, he not only learns explanations of those questions, but his mind is sharpened in the process. His sense for subtleties becomes honed, sharpened and acute. As he continues to advance, his growing sensitivity will alert him to new questions, providing new insights.

I will suggest my own idea on this point: All knowledge could not possibly be committed to writing. It is too vast. To lead man to the basic categories of thought, justice, morality and science, God condensed pathways for the exploration of His knowledge via a discreet Torah. Such a condensation requires that there be avenues to expose man to the infinite knowledge which exists, after he reads all the fixed number of verses. These avenues are the subtleties, the contradictions, exaggerations, omissions, and repetitions in the texts, which alert us to a required, deeper understanding. From that deeper level, we go even further, we repeat the process again and again for the duration of our lives.

Denouncing Terror Too Late

RABBI RUVEN MANN

I applaud Muhammad Hisham Kabbani's (Islam Hates Terror, 5/24/02) clear denunciation of suicide bombing as a severe violation of the tenets of Islam. Still, I wonder why he and others like him remained silent for so many years and especially during the 20 months of the latest Intifada when suicide bombings assumed epidemic proportions. Why were Islamic voices reticent when harsh condemnation may have thwarted the killers who wreaked so much destruction?

There is no physical deterrent for someone who is willing to sacrifice his life for a "cause". However the Islamic bombers are not prepared to destroy their souls. They act in the belief that "martyrdom" will earn them eternity in some "paradise". This is the "life" they aspire to and the fear of losing it would certainly deter them. The moral obligation of Islamic theologians is to convince potential killers that their "martyrdom" is actually a heinous crime, which will only bring them eternal damnation. Had this teaching been forcefully proclaimed from the time that suicide bombing first reared its ugly head, 9/11 and many other tragedies might have been prevented.

HUMAN INTELLIGENCE

Selected Quotes

Ibn Ezra (Lev. 19:31):

"...empty brained (people) state that were it not for the fact that conjurers and magic were actual truths, the Torah would not have prohibited it, but I say just the opposite of their words, for the Torah does not command against truth only what's false, and the proof is the idols."

Meaning, if the Torah prohibits only that which has powers, then the Torah also prohibited stone idols which anyone would agree are bereft of power. A solid proof against the "empty brained" (raykay moach) individuals he refers to.

Radak (Samuel I, 28:25 towards the end):

"...although the implications of the words of the Rabbis - blessed their memory - indicate from the Talmud that the (idolatrous) woman resurrected Samuel, we do not accept these words when our intelligence tells us the opposite".

Meaning, that a woman idolater resurrecting someone is completely false according to all reason. Therefore, our reason is what we must follow, even when confronted with statements of the Rabbis which seem to imply the opposite.

Ibn Ezra (Exod. 20:1):

"if we find any of them (mitzvos) which contradicts common sense, it isn't proper that we should understand it as implied. But we should consult the books of the wise men of blessed memory, to determine if such a command is a metaphor. And if we find nothing written (by them) we would require to search out with all our ability, perhaps we can fix it (determine it). If we can't, then we abandon that mitzvah as it is, and admit we are ignorant of it".

Malbim (His commentary on the last three words of Haftoras Bamidbar - Hosea 2:22)

"You should know God, that He revealed His signs and wonders and the dwelling of His shechina among you, until you would know God with clear knowledge as something perceived by the senses, (in order that) you should no longer require belief. Because belief is something which has no clear knowledge, (it is) simply acceptance, but they have to them knowledge to know God, which is greater than belief".