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 -Maimonides, Letter to the Community of Marseille



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Weekly Parsha

Miketz

RABBI BERNARD FOX

"And it was at the end of two years and Paroh had a dream. And he was standing by the river." (Bereshit 41:1)

As the parasha opens Yosef is still in prison. Two years previously he had successfully interpreted the dream of Paroh's butler. Yosef had correctly predicted that the butler would be

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Pharaoh's Dreams

RABBI ISRAEL CHAIT

Written by student

In the beginning of the book of Exodus Chapter 1 Verse 8 it states, "A new king arose on Egypt that did not know Joseph." There is an argument amongst the Rabbis. Rav says it was literally a new king. Shmuel says it was not a new king but rather the same Pharaoh, who acted as though he did not know Joseph and made new decrees against the Jews. The position of Shmuel seems difficult. A simple reading of the text would indicate it was merely a new king. Why did Shmuel feel compelled to understand the meaning of the verse to such a strained interpretation? This explana-

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ASTROLOGY

DISREGARDING THE INCOMPREHENSIBLE

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

Some time ago my brother Nissim wrote me regarding the Torah's view of astrology. We discussed the matter, and after reviewing many sources, I wish to share our findings, and my thoughts.

(continued on page 5)

Section of Egypt's Dendera Temple Zodiac. Why do beasts form part of the horoscope?



(Miketz cont. from pg. 1)

Weekly Parsha

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released from prison and restored to his position serving Paroh. He had asked the butler to intercede, on his behalf, with Paroh. But the butler had forgotten Yosef and had not brought his case to Paroh's attention. Now, Paroh has a dream. He is troubled by this vision and seeks an interpretation. The butler is reminded of his own premonitory dream and Yosef's accurate interpretation. He tells Paroh of his experience and Yosef is brought to Paroh.

Yosef provides Paroh with an insightful and exact explanation of the dream. This episode results in Yosef's redemption and immediate appointment as Paroh's foremost minister.

The Chumash emphasizes the passage of two years from Yosef's interpretation of the butler's dream and this episode. Rashi maintains that this two-year delay in Yosef's rescue was a punishment. According to this interpretation it seems that Yosef was overconfident. He felt that through the relationship he had forged with the butler he had secured his own rescue. Hashem undermined Yosef's plan and caused the butler to forget Yosef. The Almighty taught Yosef that even the best plan can be ineffectual. We can have no security without the help of the Almighty.[1]

Rabbaynu Avraham ben HaRambam offers another explanation for the two-year hiatus. He argues that Yosef's redemption and appointment to a high position was made possible as a result of this delay. If the butler had immediately approached Paroh and pleaded Yosef's innocence, what would have been the outcome? At best, the butler would have convinced Paroh that Yosef had been unjustly imprisoned. This may have resulted in the restoration of Yosef's freedom. However, Yosef would have lost the opportunity to meet Paroh and make a personal impression. Instead, the butler completely forgot Yosef. On the occasion of Paroh's dream the butler suddenly remembers Yosef and his unpaid debt to this Hebrew. He encourages Paroh to seek Yosef's help. Yosef meets with Paroh personally and impresses the ruler. As a result, Yosef becomes the virtual king of Egypt. From this perspective the two-year delay was not a punishment. It was a blessing.[2]

“And Yosef answered Paroh saying, “It is not me. The Lord will answer concerning Paroh's fortune.” (Beresheit 41:16)

Yosef is called upon to interpret Paroh's dream. Yosef begins with a disclaimer. He explains that it is not within his power to determine the interpretation of Paroh's vision. Only the Almighty can provide an explanation of the dream.

Rashi and many other commentaries seem to see in Yosef's words an expression of humility. Yosef realized that he was not capable of explaining Paroh's dream through some personal power of insight. He was the vehicle of the Almighty. Any interpretation that would be forthcoming will be a message

provided by Hashem. Furthermore, Yosef did not want to glorify himself or mislead Paroh. He wanted Paroh to realize that it was not he, Yosef, providing the explanation. The answer would come from Hashem.[3]

Other commentaries, including Gershonides, interpret Yosef's disclaimer in a different manner. Yosef had not yet heard Paroh's dream. He could not know the message he would provide Paroh. Perhaps, the dream would contain the good tidings. It was also possible that the dream would be a message of disaster. Yosef wanted Paroh to know that he was only the messenger of the Almighty. Yosef could not determine the nature of the message. Paroh should not be angry with Yosef, if he was displeased with the interpretation.

It is also possible that Yosef had another concern. The Egyptians were primitive and superstitious. In some primitive cultures it was apparently believed that the interpreter exercised some influence over the message contained in a dream. Yosef knew that if Paroh held this belief, a great danger existed. An interpretation of ill tidings would be blamed upon Yosef. Yosef wanted to address this issue from the onset. He told Paroh that the interpreter did not influence the meaning of the dream. The dream had an objective meaning. The role of the interpreter was merely to unravel the meaning.[4]

“And Paroh gave Yosef the name Tzaphnat Paaneach. And he gave him Asenat, the daughter of Poti-Phera, the priest of Ohn, as a wife. And Yosef went forth to oversee Egypt.” (Beresheit 41:45)

Yosef interprets Paroh's dreams. The dreams foretell that Egypt will experience seven years of bountiful harvests. These will be followed by seven years of scarcity. The dreams imply a response. Paroh should collect the excess harvest from the first seven years and create a ready store for use during the years of scarcity. Paroh is impressed with Yosef's interpretation of his dreams. He appoints Yosef as his minister. He places him in charge of the preparations suggested by the dreams. He changes Yosef's name and he gives Yosef a wife.

Our pasuk describes this wife as Asenat, the daughter of Poti-Phera. Our Sages comment that this Poti-Phera was Potiphar.[5] Potiphar was Yosef's former master. He purchased Yosef from the traders that had brought him to Egypt.

It seems strange that Paroh would suggest that Yosef marry the daughter of Potiphar. In order to understand the odd nature of this choice, we must review a previous incident. Yosef was Potiphar's servant. Potiphar placed Yosef in charge of his entire estate. Yosef served Potiphar loyally. Potiphar's wife was infatuated with Yosef and repeatedly attempted to seduce him. Yosef resisted these advances. Eventually, Potiphar's wife succeeded entrapping

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Letters

(Miketz cont. from pg. 2)

Weekly Parsha

God is Not Unlimited II

Reader: Your magazine has nice Torah articles but I take issue on the article you wrote on Dec. 23, 2005 that G-d is not unlimited. How else can you explain the creation of our universe from nothing, the crossing of the Red Sea, etc. Hashem can perform the impossible and He does so every day. Thank you.

Mesora: God can undo any "natural laws" He creates. This is what we term "miracle". However, what God cannot violate...is "His nature".

This means that He cannot be unjust, He cannot become physical, He cannot be ignorant, and He cannot die. In this sense, God is in fact limited...to being God. You must distinguish between His altering of created laws which He may do at His will, and between acting unlike God...which he cannot do. The 13 Middos recited to Moses mean that these traits of God (ale rachum, v'chanun, erech apayim, etc.) are real and unchanging. This is what a "midda" means. If however we are to assume that God at anytime might not be gracious, then He lied to Moses. This cannot be, since God is also limited to being truthful.

Maimonides' descriptions of heresy include one who imagines God might be equated in any way to physical creation. This can only be heresy, if it is indeed truly "impossible" for God to partake of physical traits, like form, color, mass, and division. God Himself corroborates this, "To what shall you equate Me and I shall be similar?" (Isaiah 40:25) ■

Yosef in a compromising situation. She maneuvered Yosef into a situation in which they were alone. Again, she attempted to seduce Yosef. He rebuffed her advances. However, she grabbed Yosef's cloak. Yosef freed himself and fled. He left his garment in the hands of Potiphar's wife. She claimed that Yosef had attempted to seduce her. She offered, as proof of her accusation, Yosef's garment. Potiphar reacted by removing Yosef from his household and placing him in prison.[6]

It is odd that Paroh would chose, as Yosef's wife, Potiphar's daughter. This was the one family in Egypt that most resented Yosef.

In order to understand Paroh's decision, we must answer another question. Yosef was accused of attempting to seduce or rape Potiphar's wife. It is odd that Potiphar placed Yosef in prison. Yosef was a servant. His master had treated him benevolently. An attempt by Yosef to seduce or rape Potiphar's wife represented an unimaginable sin against his master. We would expect Potiphar to demand Yosef's execution. Why did he merely remand Yosef to prison?

Sfomo explains that Potiphar trusted Yosef. He did not believe that Yosef would attempt to seduce or rape his wife. Instead, Potiphar suspected his wife of fabricating Yosef's crime. However, he was confronted with a dilemma. He could not disregard his wife's public accusations. This would discredit her and shame her and his family. He could not execute Yosef. This would be an inexcusable injustice. Therefore, he spared Yosef's life and instead, placed him in prison.[7]

Now, we can understand Paroh's decision. Paroh wished to appoint Yosef as his minister. However, he faced a problem. How could he appoint a convicted criminal to a high ministerial position? He needed to clear Yosef's name. Paroh knew that Potiphar, himself, doubted Yosef's guilt. This provided Paroh with the opportunity to clear Yosef's name. He gave Potiphar's daughter to Yosef as a wife. This marriage communicated a message. Even Potiphar acknowledged Yosef's innocence. The proof was his willingness to allow his daughter to marry Yosef. With this marriage, Yosef was vindicated and fit to serve as Paroh's minister.

"Yosef saw his brothers and he recognized them. He disguised himself and spoke to them harshly, and he said to them, "From where have you come?" And they said, "From the land of Canaan, to purchase food." Yosef recognized his brothers, but they did not recognize him." (Beresheit 42:7-8)

Yosef was personally responsible for the distribution of all provisions in Egypt when his brothers came to Egypt to purchase food. Yosef immediately recognized them and disguised his behavior so that they would not realize that he was their brother. His subterfuge was successful and he was not found out.

Rashi explains that Yosef was much younger than

his brothers. When they had parted he did not yet have a full beard, whereas his brothers were mature adults. When the brothers arrived in Egypt, they were confronted with a bearded minister. They did not recognize their younger brother.[8]

Radak provides an alternative explanation for the brothers' failure to recognize Yosef. Strong psychological forces prevented the brothers from realizing that they stood before Yosef. The brothers had sold Yosef, and assumed that he was either dead or a lowly slave. They never doubted the effectiveness of their plan. Although they repented for the evil of their actions, they assumed that their destruction of Yosef had been complete. Radak explains that at this initial meeting the brothers observed a resemblance between the minister and their lost brother. However, they immediately rejected the implications of this observation. They just could not envision Yosef in a position of power and rulership. This prejudice provided Yosef with the opportunity to effectively disguise himself.[9]

On a deeper level, it should be noted that the original reason for the brothers' resentment of Yosef was because they perceived within him a boastful attitude. They could not accept that Yosef could be superior, or had a right to exercise control over them. Dominated by these feelings, they were now unable to recognize Yosef in the very relationship that they dreaded.

The Radak further explains that Yosef went to great lengths to assure that he would be reunited with his brothers. As senior minister in Egypt he was not obligated to personally distribute provisions. He assumed this responsibility because he wanted to personally meet every individual requesting food. He knew that as the famine continued, his brothers would eventually be forced to travel to Egypt to seek provisions. Through personally distributing these supplies, he would be assured of meeting his family.[10] ■

[1] Rabbaynu Shlomo ben Yitzchak (Rashi), Commentary on Sefer Beresheit 40:23.

[2] Rabbaynu Avraham ben HaRambam, Commentary on Sefer Beresheit 40:15.

[3] Rabbaynu Shlomo ben Yitzchak (Rashi), Commentary on Sefer Beresheit 41:17.

[4] Rabbaynu Levi ben Gershon (Ralbag / Gershonides), Commentary on Sefer Beresheit, (Mosad HaRav Kook, 1994), p 229.

[5] Rabbaynu Shlomo ben Yitzchak (Rashi), Commentary on Sefer Beresheit 41:45.

[6] Sefer Beresheit 39:1-20.

[7] Rabbaynu Ovadia Sfomo, Commentary on Sefer Beresheit, 39:19.

[8] Rabbaynu Shlomo ben Yitzchak (Rashi), Commentary on Sefer Beresheit 42:8.

[9] Rabbaynu David Kimchi (Radak), Commentary on Sefer Beresheit 42:7.

[10] Rabbaynu David Kimchi (Radak), Commentary on Sefer Beresheit 42:6.

tion seems to stretch the simple meaning of the verse. It is obvious that Shmuel detected something in Pharaoh's personality that indicates that he pretended as though he did not know Joseph.

In order to properly analyze the personality of Pharaoh and his relationship with Joseph, we must examine Pharaoh's dream and how Joseph's interpretation led to his ascendancy to power. The dreams of Pharaoh can help us examine his personality. There are two causes of dreams. One is a dream of divine origin, a prophetic vision. Another cause is the person's wishes or the thoughts of his unconscious. Pharaoh had two dreams. By analyzing and contrasting both dreams we should be able to determine the portion of the dream, which is prophetic, and the part, which is an expression of his personality. The aspects of his dreams, which are duplicative, are obviously of divine origin. However, if we examine the portions of one dream, which are not common to the other, said portion is not prophetic. It would understandably be an expression of Pharaoh's unconscious.

By analyzing the dreams we note one striking difference with respect to the dreams concerning the cows. Pharaoh sees himself as part of that dream. Genesis Chapter 41 Verse 1 states at the end thereof "...and behold I was standing above the river." Another unique aspect of this dream is that it states the origin of the cows. The cows were coming up out of the river. However, the dream of the bundles of wheat does not state their origin. We must understand; why does Pharaoh include himself in the first dream, and why does he envision the cows appearing from out of the river?

Another clue to Pharaoh's personality would be an analysis of his actions. Upon Joseph's interpretation of the dreams, Pharaoh's response seems overwhelming. He immediately appoints a despicable "Jewish lad, a slave" as his viceroy, the second most powerful position in Egypt. He dresses Joseph in ornate clothing and extends him a regal coronation. Furthermore, when his subjects come to ask his advice when they were starving, he replies "go to Joseph and whatever he tells you to do, abide by it". It would seem rather unlikely that Pharaoh was willing to relinquish all control and credit, and suddenly bestow it upon Joseph. His response, besides being overwhelming, seems incongruous to Shmuel's interpretation of his later actions. At this juncture he seems to be a righteous individual capable of appreciating and recognizing the good of Joseph. However, later, after Joseph's death, there is a complete transformation of his personality and he denies Joseph's existence and in fact, acts ruthless to his people the Jews.

An understanding of the extraneous portion of his dreams can give us an insight into his personality and can demonstrate why seemingly incompatible actions are actually consistent with his character.

In his first dream the cows arose from the river. The Hebrew term for river that the Torah uses is "ye-or". Rashi explains that this term is used because it is

referring to the Nile. The Nile was the source of sustenance for the land of Egypt. Egypt is a dry climate and the Nile overflows and irrigates Egypt. The Nile thus represents the source for the fulfillment of the Egyptians' basic needs. However, in Pharaoh's dream he was standing "al ha ye-or", above the Nile. This signifies that Pharaoh felt that he was 'above' the Nile. In his own mind he was more powerful than the powers of nature. Pharaoh considered himself a god. In fact, the Medrash tells us, that he even emptied his bowels without anyone knowing, so as the feign divinity in front of his people, never needing to relieve himself. He professed to be above the laws of nature. Thus, the most threatening occurrence to Pharaoh would be if he were not in total control. It would shatter his self image as a god. Thus, the occurrence of a drought was a fearful event to Pharaoh. The Torah tells us "vatepaem rucho", his spirit was troubled. Unconsciously, he feared losing control. That is why in the dream he envisioned the cows coming out of the river. He feared a natural event that would be beyond his control. He thus sensed that Joseph's interpretation was accurate. He therefore had to come to grips with the possibility of losing control. However, Joseph presented him with the ability to maintain control. He realized that through Joseph he would be able to retain control and keep intact his image as a god. However, in order for him to view his reliance on Joseph as a situation akin to being in control, he was coerced into viewing Joseph as an extension of himself. Psychologically there was total identification with Joseph. Therefore, his response to Joseph was overwhelming. The deification of Joseph was not an abnormal response, but on the contrary it was necessitated by his identification with Joseph. It was an expression of his vision of Joseph as his alter ego. This relationship reinstated his threatened view that he was not the most powerful force in the world: with Joseph, he now resumed his self-image as a god. Therefore, when people asked him what to do, he quite naturally responded, "whatever Joseph says, do". It bolstered his image of being in control. Joseph's actions were merely expressions of his own power. Pharaoh and Joseph together, in his mind, were one entity.

We can now understand Shmuel's explanation. After Joseph's death, Pharaoh, because of his psychological make-up, faced a terrible problem. Narcissism, the love of oneself, was a key characteristic of Pharaoh's personality. A narcissistic individual's psychic energies are directed towards the love of the self. However, when a person like Pharaoh, strongly identifies with another individual and views him as his alter-ego, that other person becomes a source of his narcissistic, psychic energy. Therefore, upon Joseph's death, the excess psychic energy could no longer be channeled towards his alter ego. He began to confront the same emotions that he previously experienced. He felt threatened by the fact that he was really not in control. However, he could not use the defense mechanism of identification but instead

resorted to denial. He was unable to confront the fact that Joseph really allowed him to retain control. Therefore, psychologically, in order to function without feeling threatened, he had to act as though he did not know Joseph. Any remembrance of Joseph or acknowledging Joseph's value was painful to his self-image of being all-powerful. Accordingly, not only did he have to act as though he did not know Joseph, but that denial coerced him to act in the opposite fashion. His remembrance of Joseph was so painful; it served as the source for his oppression towards Joseph's people, the children of Israel.

Therefore Shmuel stated that "a new king" is only viewed as new, in terms of his actions. However an analysis of Pharaoh's personality indicates that on the contrary, it was the same Pharaoh. That is why the Torah specifically articulates that the new king did not know Joseph. If he were truly a new king the statement would be redundant. The Torah is really offering us an insight into his nature.

An example of this type of psychological mechanism is evident in Christianity. The Christian hates the Jew for ostensibly killing his G-d. However, this is indicative of a psychological defense mechanism. The Christian cannot admit that we gave them their G-d, since Jesus was Jewish.

Jacob upon meeting Pharaoh was keenly aware of Pharaoh's true nature. His response to Pharaoh's inquiry with respect to his age seems rather lengthy and irrelevant. Genesis Chapter 49 at Verse 9, "And Jacob said to Pharaoh, the days of the years of my sojourning are 130, few and bad were the years of my life and I have not reached the days of the years of the lives of my fathers, in the days of their sojourns." Nachmanides questions this rather lengthy response. However, based upon our insight into Pharaoh's personality, it is understandable. A person, who perceives himself as all-powerful and god-like, feels threatened by someone who possesses something that is desirable, which he does not have. Jacob realized that Pharaoh had such a personality. He sensed that Pharaoh, when questioning his age, noted he was an elder and was asking more, out of a sense of envy rather than curiosity. He sensed that he possessed something that Pharaoh desired: old age. Accordingly, Jacob who was old, at a time when people were not living so long, responded based upon this perception. He stated that he was not so old, and that he did not have a good life nor live as long as his fathers. He attempted to dispel any envy that Pharaoh may have had. He did not want to entice Pharaoh's anger by giving him any cause for jealousy. Therefore, his lengthy response was appropriate and warranted, considering the circumstances.

It also explains the blessing that Jacob bestowed upon Pharaoh. Rashi tells us that he blessed him that the Nile should rise to greet him whenever he approaches it. Jacob was aware of Pharaoh's personality. This blessing Pharaoh truly cherished. It represented that even the most powerful phenomenon of nature would be subordinate to his control. ■

(Astrology continued from page 1)

Astrology

"I know that you may search and find sayings of some individual sages in the Talmud and Midrashim whose words appear to maintain that at the moment of a man's birth, the stars will cause such and such to happen to him. Do not regard this as a difficulty, for it is not fitting for a man to abandon the prevailing law and raise once again the counterarguments and replies (that preceded its enactment). Similarly it is not proper to abandon matters of reason that have already been verified by proofs, shake loose of them, and depend on the words of a single one of the sages from whom possibly the matter was hidden." –Maimonides, "Letter to the Community of Marseille"

Maimonides teaches that reason must be the ultimate guide of our thoughts and actions. Once we know something to be true based on reason and proof, any opposition, even from the Sages, should be of no consequence. Maimonides was guided by his understanding of the universe; there are fixed laws of nature and Divine providence, and our acceptance of theories and truths have but a single arbiter: "proof". Once we see a proof for something, all other views are of no regard, for "proof" means that man has uncovered conclusive reasoning for how the universe operates. And any view opposing that which has been demonstrated, must be false.

Certainly, the method displayed by many individuals defending a view simply because a Sage or Rabbi stated it, is self-contradictory, as seen in this example: Ruben accepts Rabbi "A" on a certain, philosophical issue. Then, Ruben reads that Rabbi "B" opposes Rabbi "A". What shall Ruben do? He already claimed support for Rabbi "A", based on his reputation. Now when he learns that Rabbi "B" opposed it, how does Ruben decide which is truth? For two opposing views cannot both be correct: either one is correct and one is wrong, or, both are wrong. But both cannot be correct if they oppose each other. Relying on reputation alone, Ruben is at a stalemate.

Many times, it is confidence alone that people lack – not proofs – and therefore they cannot say, "I think Rabbi "B" is more sensible. Sometimes this stems from false humility, and sometimes, from the lack of independent thought, and their inability to cleave to truth, over reputations. Maimonides teaches that this path cannot be followed, for the clear reason proved in Ruben's stalemate. Man must use reason to determine truth: this is precisely why God granted "each" of us intelligence. We are not to simply "follow the leader".

Now, when approaching the area of astrology, we are faced with this dilemma: great reputations oppose each other. Do we follow Maimonides, or

Ramban and the Ramchal? Actually, this is not how a thinker frames his question, for a true thinker seeking truth cares little about reputations, and is concerned only for what is reasonable. The thinker is not deciding between Ramban and Maimonides, but he divorces the theories from the personalities, judging theories on their own merit. We are certain that our Baalei HaMesora – Masters of the Oral law – always followed Maimonides' principle of following truth over any other consideration:

"It is not proper for a man to accept as trustworthy anything other than one of these three things: 1) clear proof deriving from man's reasoning; 2) what is perceived through one of the five senses; 3) what is received from the prophets or from the righteous. Every reasonable man ought to distinguish in his mind and thought all the things that he accepts as trustworthy, and say: "This I accept as trustworthy because of tradition, and this because of sense-perception, and this on grounds of reason." Anyone who accepts as trustworthy anything that is not of these three species, of him it is said: "The simple believes everything" (Prov. 14:15). –Maimonides, "Letter to the Community of Marseille"

Maimonides teaches that our acceptance of truths must be limited to one of these three methods; reason, sense perception, or Torah tradition. Based on the third, let us review some Torah verses addressing astrology. We will then answer other quotes, which "seem" to contradict our findings – not because we need to, but because we can.

Torah Refutations

I this week's Parsha Miketz (Gen.41:8) Pharaoh has two dreams: in one, seven lean cows swallow seven healthy cows, and in the second, seven lean ears of corn swallow seven healthy ears. In both dreams, no display of ingestion could be discerned. Pharaoh was deeply bothered by his dreams, but "he could find no interpreter." (ibid)

Typically, Pharaoh would accept his astrologers' theories. However, in this case, as Pharaoh was distraught, his regular acceptance of astrological theories did not suffice to settle his mind. Here, when he was personally involved, he dismissed the baseless quality of his astrologers' explanations. This teaches that there were no incontrovertible proofs in the words of his astrologers.

On verse 41:8, Rashi states that his Egyptian astrologers suggested the dreams to mean that Pharaoh will bear seven daughters, and that he will bury seven daughters. However, this never occurred. We learn that these astrologers were



lying, and had no knowledge based on their astrology. Why did they speak up when they knew they were lying about foreknowledge? The answer is because they desired to retain their posts as Pharaoh's ministers: honor and fame is a great lure. Surely, his astrologers were consulted in the past, and as back then, they would suggest meanings, otherwise, they had no use to Pharaoh. Why would Pharaoh retain them? Because they could not be proven wrong; they might claim, "You will yet have those daughters and you will yet bury them." The astrologers were wise enough not to paint themselves into a corner. Pharaoh may have retained their posts for the additional reason that he needed to consult with mystics, and perhaps, sometimes, these astrologers guessed correctly. They clearly received their position based on some performance...be their prior successes based on mere intuition, or coincidence. But foreknowledge is clearly dismissed, as seen in this example of the seven daughters therapy.

Why did Pharaoh accept Joseph's dream interpretations? It appears from Joseph's method of explanation, that at a certain point even before completing his interpretation, Joseph was convinced he imbued Pharaoh with the true explanation. At that point midstream, Joseph exclaims, "This is the thing that I told Pharaoh: what God plans to do, He has shown to Pharaoh." (Exod. 41:28) Joseph could have only said this, if he was certain that he already proved the true meaning, and that this was Divine. Thus, he tells Pharaoh, in other words, "Do you now see? This proves your dreams are divine!"

With the words, "The dreams of Pharaoh are one" – which Joseph repeats – Joseph was convinced in his interpretation, and that he also proved to Pharaoh his interpretation was correct.

(continued on next page)

(Astrology continued from page 5)

Astrology

Telling Pharaoh twice, "The dreams of Pharaoh are one", Joseph deviated from the arbitrary methods of the astrologers, focusing on a repeating "design" in the dream, not merely offering an alternative explanation of the "content". With his explanation of the repeating "design" feature, Joseph distinguished the uniqueness of his interpretation, from that of the astrologers'. Thereby, Pharaoh was convinced that Joseph was correct. Ibn Ezra (41:32) states that the dreams' duplication – in a single night – meant that God's plan was imminent as well. So the dreams' duplication in general proved that the dreams were divine; and the fact that the two dreams occurred in a single night proved that God's plan was imminent.

In Exodus 2:3, Moses' mother could "no longer hide him". After a premature birth to Moses, just six months pregnant, Moses' mother Yocheved was only able to hide him from the Egyptian, genocidal decree for three months. Why? Because according to Rashi, the Egyptians calculated when nine months would arrive after Yocheved and her husband reunited, expecting them to bear a child only after that time. This proves that the Egyptians' astrology was false: they continued killing infants fearing the birth of the Jews' savior...even after Moses was born! But since Moses – the savior – was already born, why did they continue their murders? They must have felt the messiah was "yet" to be born. But they were mistaken, for Moses was already alive for three full months. Again, they failed at discerning a matter through astrology.

In Exodus 1:16 Rashi explained why Pharaoh decreed the death of the males, "for the astrologers saw that a savior was to be born to the Jews". But this is common sense: any oppressed people possess the probability of an uprising. Here, claims of astrological knowledge are unnecessary: psychology explains this quite easily. In Exodus 1:22 Rashi states, "On the day Moses was born, Pharaoh's astrologers told him, 'today the savior has been born, but we know no whether he is Egyptian or Jew'." The words "On the day Moses was born..." are misleading, for one might think that Rashi was convinced that the astrologers knew the exact day that Moses was born. However, as a Rabbi once taught, this was not necessarily the first time the astrologers told Pharaoh a savior was born...they may have said this on numerous occasions, exposing their ignorance. Their claim again here, was merely chance.

Saadia Gaon remarks that Egypt's magic was sleight of hand, and nothing more. ("The Book of Beliefs & Opinions", pg. 153) This also explains why the Egyptian astrologers could duplicate Moses' first two signs of blood and frogs: these objects can be manipulated with adequate, tactile dexterity. Saadia Gaon states the astrologers

deceived others, using dyes to merely mimic blood, and tossing chemicals into the Nile causing the frogs to flee to the unpolluted, dry ground. Through their deception, the astrologers simulated Moses' two plagues. However, the astrologers could not manipulate the third plague of lice. Lice are too small for the hand to adequately maneuver. Thus, the Egyptians attested, "this is the finger of God." They admitted their lack of control, but did so in a way – again – where they were not to blame, for "God is superior".

Supposed astrological powers or knowledge are repeatedly refuted. No proof for astrological theories presents itself in any of these cases. And astrological claims have yet to be validated.

Refutation in Prophets

But the most glaring refutation of astrology, is God's very words:

"So says God, 'To the ways of the nations do not learn, and from the signs of heaven, do not fear, for the nations fear them. For the statutes of the nations are futile, for a tree from the forest they cut, the work of an artisan with an adze. With silver and gold they adorn it; with nails and pegs they strengthen it so it does not disconnect. They are like a sculpted palm tree and they cannot speak, they are carried about for they cannot walk: do not fear them, for they cannot harm and they also cannot do good.'" (Jeremiah 10:1-5)

God clearly teaches man that the nations live in foolishness, that stars or heavenly signs (occurrences) are nothing to fear, and idols are manmade. Man has no reason to attribute powers to his sculpted creations. They cannot speak or walk as man, yet man attributes more powers to these idols, than to himself. Herein is man's distortion: man is greater and can walk and talk; yet he assumes these inanimate blocks of wood to possess greater powers than he. God exposes the corruption of thought harbored by these nations, and groups therein, the practice of fearing heavenly phenomena. It is no coincidence that God groups heavenly signs together with idolatry in His ridicule. God says both; heavenly phenomena and idolatry are equally futile. Would it then be sensible to claim that the stars and astrology are not for Jews to follow, but for gentiles it is permissible, or that it even works? But God plainly states, "For the statutes of the nations are futile". This applies to the object or practice, and it matters none if the followers are gentile or Jews. God states openly "for they cannot harm and they also cannot do good." These are God's own words. This satisfies the third of Maimonides' three categories for determining truth "Torah traditions": traditions must be true, certainly God's words, as read here

from Jeremiah.

Maimonides' second category of truths is sense perception, that is, all that we perceive is accurate and truth. And we have no perception or proof of the stars affecting our free will. Just the opposite is the case: our free will is "free" and uncontrolled by anything, but our will alone.

Maimonides first rule is that when something is proven, we care nothing about what we might find, even in the words of the Sages, as he says, "Similarly it is not proper to abandon matters of reason that have already been verified by proofs, shake loose of them, and depend on the words of a single one of the sages from whom possibly the matter was hidden."

Maimonides teaches that the very fact God gave us commands must be predicated on our ability to comply. We are free to follow God or oppose Him, and therefore, stars and zodiacs contribute nothing to our own choices, for which we are justly rewarded or punished. "For all His ways are judgment." (Deut. 32:4). "Whose eyes are open upon all the ways of the sons of men, to give every one according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings." (Jer. 32:19)

Talmud: Astrology or Psychology?

The Talmud (Sab. 156a) suggests that depending on the day or hour of one's birth, he will possess a certain personality. If taken literally, I can offer no explanation. However, can we answer this in light of what we have stated to this point? But before we answer that, why is the entire discussion in the Talmud concerning one's "birth"? Why is this moment given such status, when in fact, King Solomon said "Better is the day of one's death than the day of his birth"? (Eccl. 7:1) Why does the Talmud elevate birth, when King Solomon elevated death? Ibn Ezra answers this question: "at birth, we know not yet what will be come of this child; he might turn out good or evil. But at death, he has already earned his good name." Thus even Ibn Ezra of whom it is said endorsed "astrology", did not ascribe to fates, and here commits to his view that at birth, nothing is known. Death is better; for it is only then that we can determine through historical proof, whether an individual is good or evil.

So how then does the Talmud state that if one is born on Sunday, he will be either totally good, or totally evil? Rashi states that since Sunday is the "lead" day of the week, one who is born on Sunday will also be a leader, in either the good life, or the evil life. This explanation removes any need for astrological theories, and uses proven, psychological principles to explain why such a person will lead: he identifies with that "lead" day of the week, which itself would be insignificant, had it not harkened back to God's six days of creation. So man is not directed by some unknown, astrological

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“power”, but functions many times based on his emotions: specifically, his emotion of identification.

Since man’s ego tends to endorse “his” existence with great value, he invests his very first day on Earth with unparalleled significance: “my birthday has meaning” he feels. Thus, he looks at what “other” significant events occurred on that day, to bolster his self worth. He realizes God’s creation is great, and parallels himself to God’s creation by viewing the day of his birth on par with that day of the week in Creation. He then latches on to that day’s significance (the “lead” day in our case) and then creates a self-fulfilling prophecy. The Talmud continues with additional examples: “He who is born on the second day of the week will be bad-tempered. What is the reason? Because the waters were divided thereon. (Division or disunity is caused by bad temper, Rashi) so will he be estranged from other people through his temper). He who is born on the third day of the week will be wealthy and unchaste. What is the reason? Because herbs were created thereon. (Herbs multiply very rapidly and also continually intermingle with other herbs.) He who is born on the fourth day of the week will be wise and of a retentive memory. What is the reason? Because the luminaries were suspended [thereon].”

In all these cases, man’s life then follows what he decided himself. The heavenly phenomena play absolutely no role in determining his fate. We also learn, “All is in the hand of heaven, except for the fear of heaven”. Man is solely responsible for his actions. This Talmudic portion can be explained reasonably, and with no need to resort to more popular views of astrology. It educates man on his insecurities, and his means to inflate his worth. In truth, King Solomon is correct: one’s birthday is insignificant. But it is also true that man is partial to himself, and ignores truths when they counter his ego.

Another explanation of the Talmud, that one born on Sunday will possess qualities of that primordial day, may simply mean that “man is the focus of creation”. Thus, this is expressed by stating that man reflects something of the initial six days of creation: man is the objective in the Earth’s creation.

This Talmudic portion concludes with five additional cases where individuals were not subject to planetary influence, but received their good lot based on merit. It is worth noting that two of those cases deal with serpents, which might allude to those cases being metaphorical, discussing man’s instincts (serpent), not real events. But even taken literally, we find two opposing Talmudic views debating if astrology offers any true knowledge. On this, Maimonides wrote as we quoted, that we do not abandon what is proven, even if opposed by a sage.



Astrology Equated to Idolatry: Human Insecurity

We see from God’s words in Jeremiah 10 that He warns us against attributing any significance to heavenly signs, or idolatry, and He groups the two crimes together, since they are related. In fact, Maimonides teaches that it is precisely man’s flawed attribution of greatness to the stars, from which idolatry was born. Idolatry is actually referred to as “Avodas Kochavim”, “star worship”. Maimonides elaborates on this in his first laws of his Mishne Torah, Laws of Star Worship (idolatry).

To those who cleave to a belief in astrology, you must realize that you cannot claim a belief in something, if you cannot explain it. A Rabbi once defined idolatry as “claiming a causal relationship for things unrelated.” He meant to say that idolatry has no basis in reason or what we perceive, so that we should accept it. Astrology is no different: if you cannot explain it, it must not be accepted, as our lives are to be guided by reason. Even if one were to say astrology is a force of nature, but he does not know what it is, it is worthless to say “I agree with it”. That is an outright lie. To suggest astrology refers to “heavenly powers which guide human affairs” is a nonsensical statement, if one cannot prove those powers exists, or how they govern man.

Regardless of which Rabbi held astrology to be truth or falsehood, I ask: “Why, without an argument reasonable to your mind, do you accept

a premise...just because others do?” Astrology is not an area of Jewish “law”, so there is no ruling or “psak”. Therefore, feel not obligated to agree with one view over another. And be honest: if there are two opposing views, one must be wrong. And if you cannot reasonably prove your view, your view may be the incorrect one. Certainly, if the opposing view is explained rationally, as Maimonides has done, and as we read in the Torah and know from experience, that man has freewill, why should you not abandon your view in place of what makes sense?

You must also know that if any of the Rabbis were demonstrated that his view was false, he would admit it. We witness this devotion to truth throughout the Talmud. Honesty and truth are at the helm of every Torah scholar, Rabbi, and Sage. Not a single one remained in his view once disproved, realizing it violated reason, science, or Torah.

You must also be sensitive to your feelings of insecurity, to which astrology caters. Assuming there are “powers out there guiding me” is quite comforting, and relieves one of his responsibilities. He can easily blame all his shortcomings on his horoscope. But remember that the Torah prohibits horoscopists. Horoscopes satisfy the very same insecurities which idols were created to address. This is why God groups idolatry with heavenly signs in Jeremiah: they share the same origin, human insecurity.

Living in line with truth, means we examine all facets of our lives, which are primarily psychological in nature. If you ignore self-assessment and reflection, you will never see your flaws, and never repent, which God desires for our own good.

We are not born with all of the answers...far from it. But with honesty, we can arrive at an ever-growing attachment to truth, where we spend less time defending our predisposed, unexamined notions, and more time defenselessly seeking what is real and true.

Ibn Ezra on Leviticus 19:31 says the following, “Those with empty brains say ‘were it not that fortune tellers and magicians were true, the Torah would not prohibit them.’ But I (Ibn Ezra) say just the opposite of their words, because the Torah doesn’t prohibit that which is true, but it prohibits that which is false. And the proof is the prohibition on idols and statues.” Based on this Ibn Ezra, as the Torah prohibits fortunetellers and horoscopists, they must be equally false practices, affording man lies, and not truth.

Again, as Maimonides wrote, simply because one Rabbi accepted astrology, this is no basis for you to accept it, especially when you do not fathom what he did, or understand his words, and possess reason to refute it. First and foremost, you must know what God said to be true, starting with

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Weekly Parsha

Jeremiah, and throughout the Tanach...this must be your measuring rod. But do not seek to defend a cherished view, if your mind tells you it violates God's Torah.

The Rabbis state, "All is in the hand of heaven, except the fear of heaven". This means that one's wealth, health, personalities, children and all matters aside from free will are decided by God. Whatever God's means are for determining our personalities or world events, God does so with wisdom, whether we know how He does this or not: "All His ways are just". The One who gave such a perfect system of wisdom, i.e., the Torah, surely works with wisdom. The One who created and governs the universe with intelligent laws is consistent. Therefore, it is a denial of God's methods of wisdom to follow personalities instead of theories, certainly, when you are bereft of any understanding about what you verbally support and merely follow the masses. God does not wish that man lies, and accept a view, unless man understands that view. Whether on a specific issue a Rabbi was right or wrong, this is not our concern to prove, for all men err. What our Rabbis teach is that we engage our minds alone for determining truth. If some view is contrary to reason, we are wise to ignore it. Judaism's teachers unanimously agree: our "methods" of decision-making are crucial, not who we follow in the end. This may sound odd, but provided we use our intellects granted by God, we are not to blame for concluding something God knows is false. The principle "Lo Bashamayim Hi", "It is not in heaven", teaches that our objective is not to make sure we know what God knows, but that we arrive at decisions to the best of our abilities. "Aylu v'Aylu, Divray Elohim Chaim", "These and these, the words of God are life", means that regardless of "these views or those views" (opposing rulings) both are nonetheless attempts to arrive at truth, and that is what is praiseworthy, "Divray Elohim Chaim". Of course, when two views oppose each other, one must be wrong, but that is not in man's hands at all times, and not to his discredit. This last quote means to praise all those who honestly engage their minds in the pursuit of truth, regardless of their outcome.

We know quite little about how God governs the world. And just as we admit that point, we must be consistent and admit when we do not understand any other matter. And it makes no difference if a Rabbi claims to understand it. For if "we" do not, we have no grounds to agree with that view, whether he is right or wrong. "Agree" means we apprehend a matter, and understand it as consistent with how the world operates. Our allegiance to a theory must be, as Maimonides taught, based on proof, perception, or Torah Traditions. ■

Pharaoh's Wisdom

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM



In Genesis, 41:45, we find that after Pharaoh sees the undeniable brilliance of Joseph, Pharaoh selects Joseph to be his second in command over Egypt. The passage states three ideas, 1) Pharaoh changes Joseph's name to Zaphnas Paneach, 2) he gave Asnas, the daughter of Poti-Phera (now subtly referred to as "Priest" of Ohn) to Joseph as his wife, and 3) Joseph goes out on Egypt (to rule).

We have a mesora - a tradition - that when one pasuk (passage) contains many points, they must all be related, as they have been decided by God to be placed in a single verse.

We then have the following questions:

- 1) What is the connection between all the points in this passage?
- 2) Why give Joseph the daughter of Poti-Phera? His wife accused Joseph of attempted rape! Wasn't there a better choice of a mate, if he must have a wife?
- 3) Why is Poti-Phera suddenly referred to as a "priest"?
- 4) What does Joseph "going out on Egypt" have to do with anything?
- 5) Why does Pharaoh change Joseph's name to Zaphnas Paneach?

With a little consideration, the answers leap from this passage.

Pharaoh was in his position - not without intelligence. Upon summoning Joseph from prison to interpret his dreams, Pharaoh was cognizant of the future political problems faced with elevating an imprisoned Jew to viceroy status. More to the point, Pharaoh was appointing one accused of rape. This would not wash well with his subjects, or his country. How would Pharaoh deal with this?

I believe with the following answer, we unveil insight into Pharaoh's wisdom.

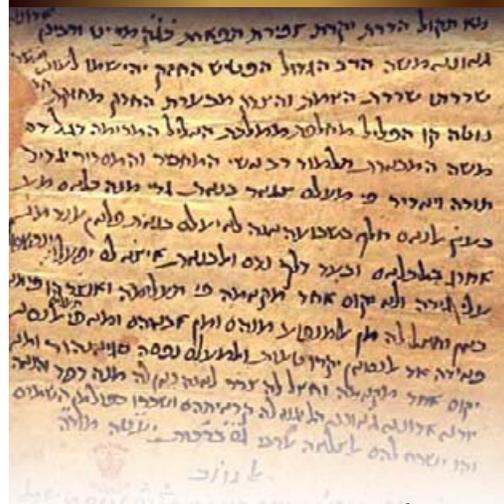
Pharaoh attempted to dispel any rumors of

Joseph's ill repute by giving him this specific woman for a wife. Who in their right minds would believe that Joseph attempted rape of a woman, the wife of Poti-Phera, and then marries her very daughter? Pharaoh caused Egypt to believe that the rape accusation was not true. Further, Poti-Phera's wife would no longer accuse Joseph, as any accusation would bring shame to her daughter, and to herself. In addition to silencing the wife of Poti-Phera, Pharaoh sought to silence Poti-Phera himself about Joseph's alleged rape attempt. What do people desire more than anything else? More than money? Power. Pharaoh again displayed his cunning by granting a status of priest to Poti-Phera, in exchange for his silence. At first, Poti-Phera was not referred to in the verses as a "priest". This is changed afterwards to silence him. Finally, Pharaoh's changing of Joseph's name was an attempt to transform his Hebrew slave reputation, into an Egyptian icon. One's name creates a perceived status.

We now see how these ideas are all connected, and why God desired them to be in one passage. All of the elements in this passage aim towards Pharaoh's one goal of denying Joseph's alleged wrongdoings. But what about "Joseph going out on Egypt"? What is the Torah's lesson of placing it here? I believe it is to show that regardless of Pharaoh's success in rendering Joseph into a leader acceptable by the Egyptians, Joseph never shed his identity as "Joseph the Righteous". It was still "Joseph" who went out upon Egypt, and not the fabricated, Egyptian veneer "Zaphnas Paneach" created by Pharaoh.

It is enlightening to see the precision of the Torah - how it is written so sparingly. Just enough information is revealed to suggest the problem, and just enough for the answer. It is brilliant that those very statements, which cause the problem, are in fact, clues to the answer. ■

Astrology



Maimonides' Letter to the Community of Marseille

Letter

on

Astrology

MAIMONIDES

I perceive in this inquiry that although its boughs are many, they are all branches of a single tree, which is their common root: namely, all the statements of “the astrologers, the stargazers” (Is. 47:13). It is evident that the compilation we have made of the statutes of the Torah, which we entitled *Mishneh Torah*, has not reached you. If it had, you would have known directly my opinion regarding all those things of which you have inquired; for we have made this entire matter clear in (the section of that work called) *Laws Concerning Idolatry and the Ordinances of the Nations*. It seems to me that it will come to you before this reply, since it is already widespread on the island of Sicily, as well as in the West and in the East and in the South. In any case, I myself need to make this clear to you.

Know, my masters, that it is not proper for a man to accept as trustworthy anything other than one of these three things. The first is a thing for which there is a clear proof deriving from man’s reasoning—such as arithmetic’ geometry, and astronomy. The second is a thing that a man perceives through one of the five senses—such as when he knows with certainty that this is red and this is black and the like through the sight of his eye; or as when he tastes that this is bitter and this is sweet; or as when he feels that this is hot and this is cold; or as when he hears that this sound is clear and this sound is indistinct; or as when he smells that this is a pleasing smell and this is a displeasing smell and the like. The third is a thing that a man receives from the prophets or from the righteous. Every reasonable man ought to distinguish in his mind and thought all the things that he accepts as trustworthy, and say: “This I accept as trustworthy because of tradition, and this because of sense-perception, and this on grounds of reason.” Anyone who accepts as trustworthy anything that is not of these three species, of him it is said: “The simple believes everything” (Prov. 14:15).

Thus you ought to know that fools have composed thousands of books of nothingness and emptiness. Any number of men, great in years but not in wisdom, wasted all their days in studying these books and imagined that these follies are science. They came to think of themselves as wise men because they knew that science. The thing about which most of the world errs, or all of it—save for a few individuals, “the remnant of whom the Lord shall call” (Joel 3:5)—is that thing of which I am apprising you. The great sickness and the “grievous evil” (Eccles. 5:12, 15) consist in this: that all the things that man finds written in books, he presumes to think of as true—and all the more so if the books are old. And since many individuals have busied themselves with those books and have engaged in discussions concerning them, the rash fellow’s mind at once leaps to the conclusion that these are words of wisdom,

and he says to himself: “Has the pen of the scribes written in vain” (Jer. 8:8), and have they vainly engaged in these things? This is why our kingdom was lost and our Temple was destroyed and why we were brought to this; for our fathers sinned and are no more because they found many books dealing with these themes of the star gazers, these things being the root of idolatry, as we have made clear in *Laws Concerning Idolatry*. They erred and were drawn after them, imagining them to be glorious science and to be of great utility. They did not busy themselves with the art of war or with the conquest of lands, but imagined that those studies would help them. Therefore the prophets called them “fools and dolts” (Jer. 4:22). And truly fools they were, “for they walked after confused things that do not profit” (I Sam. 12:21 and Jer. 2:8).

Know, my masters, that I myself have investigated much into these matters. The first thing I studied is that science which is called judicial astrology—that is, (the science) by which man may know what will come to pass in the world or in this or that city or kingdom and what will happen to a particular individual all the days of his life. I also have read in all matters concerning all of idolatry, so that it seems to me there does not remain in the world a composition on this subject, having been translated into Arabic from other languages, but that I have read it and have understood its subject matter and have plumbed the depth of its thought. From those books it became clear to me what the reason is for all those commandments that everyone comes to think of as having no reason at all other than the decree of Scripture. I already have a great composition on this subject in the Arabic language (namely, the *Guide of the Perplexed*) with lucid proofs for every single commandment but this is not required of us now. I now return to the subject of your inquiry.

Know, my masters, that every one of those things concerning judicial astrology that (its adherents) maintain—namely, that something will happen one way and not another, and that the constellation under which one is born will draw him on so that he will be of such and such a kind and so that something will happen to him one way and not another—all those assertions are far from being scientific; they are stupidity. There are lucid, faultless proofs refuting all the roots of those assertions. Never did one of those genuinely wise men of the nations busy himself with this matter or write on it, no (nation) wrote such compositions or committed the error of calling it a science, other than the Chasdeans, Chaldeans, Canaanites, and Egyptians, for that was their religion in those days. But the wise men of Greece—and they are the philosophers who wrote on science and busied themselves with all the species of science—mock

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“It is not proper for a man to accept as trustworthy anything other than one of these three things: 1) clear proof deriving from man's reasoning; 2) what is perceived through one of the five senses; 3) what is received from the prophets or from the righteous. Every reasonable man ought to distinguish in his mind and thought all the things that he accepts as trustworthy, and say: “This I accept as trustworthy because of tradition, and this because of sense-perception, and this on grounds of reason.” Anyone who accepts as trustworthy anything that is not of these three species, of him it is said: “The simple believes everything” (Prov. 14:15)

and scorn and ridicule these four nations that I have mentioned to you, and they rally proofs to refute their entire position “root and branch” (Mal. 3:19). The wise men of Persia also recognized and understood that all that science which the Chaldeans, Chaldeans, Egyptians, and Canaanites produced is a falsehood and a lie. Do not imagine that those refutations are mere assertions and that we therefore should not put our trust in them; rather there are lucid and correct, faultless proofs to refute that entire position, and the only one who would cling to it would be “a simple one who believes everything” (Prov. 14:15), or one who wishes to deceive others.

And know, my masters, that the science of the stars that is genuine science is knowledge of the form of the spheres, their number, their measure, the course they follow, each one's period of revolution, their declination to the north or to the south, their revolving to the east or to the west, and the orbit of every star and what its course is. On all this and the like, the wise men of Greece, Persia, and India wrote compositions. This is an exceedingly glorious science. By means of it the onset of the eclipses of luminaries may be known and when they will be eclipsed at any given place; by means of it there may be known the cause for the moon's (yareah) appearing just like a bow, then waxing great until it is full, and then gradually waning; by means of it there may be known when the moon (levanah) will or will not be seen; and the reason why one day will be long and another day short; and the reason why two stars will rise as one, but not set together; and the reason why a given day at a given place is thirteen hours long and in another place fifteen or sixteen or twenty hours long, yet being a single day. (In one place the day and the night will be of equal duration; in another place the day will be like a month or two months or three—so that a place may be found where the entire year is a single day, six months daytime and six months nighttime.) How many amazing conditions are made intelligible by this science, all of which is undoubtedly true. It is this calculation of astronomical cycles of which the (Talmudic) sages said that it is wisdom and understanding in the sight of the (Gentile) peoples (Shabbat 75a). But as for these assertions of the stupid astrologers, they are nothing. I am now making clear to you the main points of those matters that are the mystery of the world.

Know, that all the wise men of the Gentile nations—and they are the great philosophers, men of intellect and science—were all in accord that the world has a Governor; He makes a sphere revolve, the sphere not revolving of itself. They have many books advancing a lucid proof for this; on this point there is no controversy among men of science. There is, however, a great controversy among them regarding this entire world, namely,

the sphere and what is beneath it.

(1) Most of them say that it is not subject to generation and corruption, but that as it is now, it was and it will be forever and ever. Just as the Holy One, blessed be He, who was always the same as He is now, is making it revolve, so was He always making it revolve, and it was always being revolved; the two of them were always together, never was one without the other.

(2) Among them there are those who maintain that this sphere has come into being and that the Deity has created it, but that there is a single thing that exists together with the Creator, “like the clay in the potter's hand” (Jer. 18:6). From that thing which exists together with Him, He makes whatever He pleases. Sometimes He will use some of that clay, as it were, to make heaven and some of it to make earth; and sometimes, if He pleases, He takes some of that out of which He has made heaven and makes something else out of it. But to bring forth something out of nothing is impossible.

(3) Among the philosophers there are those who maintain—just as the prophets maintained—that the Holy One, blessed be He, created all created things out of nothing and that there is no other thing with the Creator aside from the creation that He has brought forth.

Now the great controversy is over this point, and this is the very point that Abraham our Father discerned. A thousand books have already been written on this, with proofs that each and every one of them rallies to support its position. It is the root of the Torah that the Deity alone is primordial and that He has created the whole out of nothing; whoever does not acknowledge this is guilty of radical unbelief and is guilty of heresy. I myself have already written a great composition in Arabic (Guide of the Perplexed) on these matters. I have explained the lucid proofs of the existence of the Creator and that He is one and that He is not a body or corporeal in any respect. I have shattered all those proofs that the philosophers advance as proving that the world was not created. In addition, I have resolved all the great difficulties that they have raised against us on account of our maintaining that the Deity has created everything that exists out of nothing.... All these, then, are the three sects into which the wise men of the world fall, from the earliest antiquity down to now.

(1) Those who maintain that the sphere is not a created thing, but that it eternally has been and will be just as it is.

(2) Those who maintain that the Deity has created it out of that matter which always exists by Him.

(3) Those who maintain—just as all the prophets did—that there is no other thing that is with the Deity, just He Himself, and that when He wished, He brought forth this world out of nothing, in conformity with His will.

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Astrology

“There is no influence or constellation under which one is born that will draw him in any manner toward any one of these ways. Hence it was commanded and told to him: “Do this and do not do that.”

All of these three sects are in accord on the following point. Everything that comes into being in this lower world—namely, every “living soul” (Gen. 1:30) and every tree and every species of grass and every one of the species of minerals—the whole has the Deity as its maker, through a power coming from the spheres and the stars. And they are in accord that the power of the Creator flows first upon the spheres and the stars; from the spheres and the stars it flows and spreads through this (lower) world—everything that is, thereby coming into being. Just as we maintain that the Holy One, blessed be He, performs signs and wonders through the angels, so do these philosophers maintain that all these occurrences in the nature of the world come through the spheres and the stars. They maintain that the spheres and the stars possess souls and knowledge. All these things are true. I myself have already made it clear, with proofs, that all these things involve no damage to religion. And not only this, but what is more I have understood from the sayings of the sages in all of the Midrashim that they maintain as the philosophers maintained. There is no controversy whatever between the sages of Israel and the philosophers on these matters, as I have made clear in those chapters [in the Guide of the Perplexed, a philosophical treatise].

All three of these sects of the philosophers, which maintain that everything is made by means of the spheres and the stars, also maintain that whatever happens to each and every human being is due to chance; it is not due to any cause coming from above, and neither the constellation under which one is born nor nature will avail against it. There is no difference for them between this individual who was torn to pieces by a lion that happened upon him, or this mouse that was torn to pieces by a cat, or this fly that was torn to pieces by a spider. Neither is there a difference between a roof’s falling upon and killing someone, or a rock’s breaking loose from a mountain and falling upon a tree or upon another rock and breaking it. All this, they maintain, is simply fortuitous. It is said as well of those human beings who are warring with one another over a great kingdom, that they are like a pack of dogs warring over a carcass. This is not due to any cause coming from the stars. Furthermore, this one being poor and that one rich, this one having children and that one being childless—all the philosophers maintain that this is due to chance. The summary of the matter is that they maintain that what happens to each and every thing—be it man or beast or trees and minerals—is all due to chance. But the being of all the species and the things comprehended in the entire world—in which there is not the activity of a living soul—all of this stems from the power of the spheres whose root, in turn, comes from the Holy

One, blessed be He. The controversy lies in this, that the true religionists, and that is the religion of Moses our Teacher, maintain that what happens to individuals is not due to chance, but rather to judgment—as the Torah says: “For all His ways are judgment” (Deut. 32:4). The prophet explained: “Whose eyes are open upon all the ways of the sons of men, to give every one according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings” (Jer. 32:19). It is regarding this that the Torah warned and bore witness and told Israel: “But if you will not hearken to Me” (Lev. 26:14), I shall bring hardship upon you. If you maintain that that hardship is not an affliction brought on by your sins, but rather due to chance and one of those things that happen by chance, why then I Myself shall heap more of that chance upon you—as it is written: “And if you walk with Me in (the way of) chance, I too shall walk with you in the wrath of chance” (Lev. 26:27-28). This is a root of the religion of Moses our Teacher, that everything happening to human beings is a (just) decree and judgment. Hence, the sages maintained: “There is no death without sin and no affliction with transgression” (Shabbat 55a).

And know, my masters, that it is one of the roots of the religion of Moses our Teacher—and one that all the philosophers also acknowledge—that every action of human beings is left to them and that there is nothing to constrain or draw them. Rather, if he so pleases, a man will worship God and become wise and sit in the house of study. And if he so pleases, he will follow the counsel of the wicked and run with thieves and hide with adulterers. There is no influence or constellation under which one is born that will draw him in any manner toward any one of these ways. Hence it was commanded and told to him: “Do this and do not do that.” We have made clear many of the things involved in these matters in most of our Arabic compositions, in the Commentary on the Mishna and in the rest of the compositions. Thus we ought to know that what happens to human beings is not—as the philosophers maintain—like what happens to the beast.

Three disagreements are to be found in these matters. Imagine this situation. Here is Reuben, a tanner, poor, and his children have died in his own lifetime. And here is Simon, a perfumer, rich, and his children stand before him.

(1) The philosopher will maintain that this is due to chance. It is possible that Reuben could become a perfumer, grow rich, and have children; and it is possible that Simon could become impoverished, turn into a tanner, and witness his children’s death. All this is simply fortuitous. There is no nature in the world and no power emanating from a star that caused this individual to be or not to be thus. This is the position of the philosophers.

(continued on next page)



(Astrology continued from page 11)

Astrology

For in that event [that the stars govern man's will], every single individual would lack the power to do anything he set his mind to, since something else draws him on—against his will—to be this and not to be that; of what use then is the command or the Talmud?"

(2) The second position is that of those who believe in judicial astrology and whose sayings you have heard and whose follies are widespread among you. They maintain that it is impossible that a given thing should ever change. Never will Reuben be anything other than a tanner and poor and childless, for it was thus fixed by the power of the sphere at the time of his birth. Similarly, it is impossible for Simon to be anything other than a perfumer and rich and with surviving children, just as it was fixed by the power of the sphere at the time of his birth.

These two ways, or these two positions, are regarded as falsehoods by us. The position of the astrologers is given the lie by reason, for correct reasoning has already refuted, by means of lucid proofs, all those follies that they have maintained. It also is regarded as a falsehood by us because of the religious tradition, for if the matter stood thus, of what utility would the Torah and the commandment and the Talmud be to a particular individual? For in that event, every single individual would lack the power to do anything he set his mind to, since something else draws him on—against his will—to be this and not to be that; of what use then is the command or the Talmud? The roots of the religion of Moses our Teacher, we find, refute the position of these stupid ones—in addition to reason's doing so with all those proofs that the philosophers maintain to refute the position of the Chaldeans and the Chaldeans and their associates. The position of the philosophers who maintain that these things are due to chance is also regarded as a falsehood by us because of the religious tradition.

(3) The true way upon which we rely and in which we walk is this: We say regarding this Reuben and Simon, that there is nothing that draws on the one to become a perfumer and rich, and the other to become a tanner and poor. It is possible that the situation will change and be reversed, as the philosopher maintains. But the philosopher maintains that this is due to chance. We maintain that it is not due to chance, but rather that this situation depends on the will of "Him who spoke, and (the world) came into being" (Ps. 33:9); all of this is a (just) decree and judgment. We do not know the end of the Holy One's wisdom so as to know by what decree and judgment He required that this should be this way and that that should be the other way; "for His ways are not like our ways, neither are His thoughts like our thoughts" (Is. 55:8). We rather are obliged to fix in our minds that if Simon sins, he will be punished with stripes and impoverished and his children will die and the like. And if Reuben repents and mends his ways and searches his deeds and walks in a straight path, he will

grow rich and will succeed in all his undertakings and "see (his) seed and prolong (his) days" (ibid. 55:10). This is a root of the religion. If a man says, "But look, many have acted in this way and yet have not succeeded," why, this is no proof. [For] either some iniquity of theirs caused this, or they are now afflicted in order to inherit something even better than this. [But not afflicted in the senses that they are sinners, and a subsequent good will be a "reward". Maimonides means they are dealt a trail through which they will emerge with a greater good. An example is when God commanded Abraham to sacrifice Isaac. This was not commanded as a means of suffering so that Abraham might thereby be 'owed' a subsequent good. Rather, it was to actualize Abraham's potential, for his own good.]

The summary of the matter is that our mind cannot grasp how the decrees of the Holy One, blessed be He, work upon human beings in this world and in the world to come. What we have said about this from the beginning is that the entire position of the stargazers is regarded as a falsehood by all men of science. I know that you may search and find sayings of some individual sages in the Talmud and Midrashim whose words appear to maintain that at the moment of a man's birth, the stars will cause such and such to happen to him. Do not regard this as a difficulty, for it is not fitting for a man to abandon the prevailing law and raise once again the counterarguments and replies (that preceded its enactment). Similarly it is not proper to abandon matters of reason that have already been verified by proofs, shake loose of them, and depend on the words of a single one of the sages from whom possibly the matter was hidden. Or there may be an allusion in those words; or they may have been said with a view to the times and the business before him. (You surely know how many of the verses of the holy Law are not to be taken literally. Since it is known through proofs of reason that it is impossible for the thing to be literally so, the translator [of the Aramaic Targum] rendered it in a form that reason will abide.) A man should never cast his reason behind him, for the eyes are set in front, not in back.

Do not censure me, my masters, for the brevity of these remarks, for the writing makes it clear that I wrote it to fill a present need. For I was very busy with many Gentile affairs. The Deity knows that if Rabbi Pinhas had not sent a messenger who "urged me till I was ashamed" (II Kings 2:17) and did not leave my presence until I had written it, I would not be replying now since I have no leisure. On this account, judge in my favor. Farewell, my brothers, friends, and masters; may you increase and be exalted forever. Amen. ■

SACRIFICE



SOCIETAL ORDER

RABBI ISRAEL CHAIT

Written by student



“On three things the world stands: Torah, avodah, gemilut chasadim.”

After defining the framework of this Mishna as the maintenance of a functioning society, we explained the meaning and place of the factors of Torah, and Gemilut Chasadim (acts of kindness). We now move to the element of Avodah, which literally means ‘service’ and generally refers to the services performed in the Beit Hamikdash, the Holy Temple. Rashi on our Mishna thus comments that here the Mishna refers to the service in the Temple which, quoting from our Sages, allows for the heavens and earth to exist.

The Rambam makes an interesting remark on our Mishna, which deserves a thorough analysis. In explaining the term ‘Avodah’, he says that it refers to the keeping of all commandments which are the sacrifices brought in the Temple. This comment is quite perplexing; what does the Rambam mean that the keeping of commandments is the bringing of sacrifices? Sacrifices are a group of commandments themselves! Which group is being referred to in the mishna: the keeping of all commandments or the laws of sacrifices?

To unravel the meaning of the Rambam’s commentary we must first investigate the area of sacrifices in general and understand their import. Let us begin with the commentary of the Ramban on the verse in Vayikra 1:6. The Ramban begins by quoting the Rambam from the Moreh Nevuchim (Guide to the Perplexed) who says that the Jews had lived amongst idolatrous nations, such as the Egyptians, who would use animals to sacrifice to their gods. Therefore, God commanded the Jews to use those animals as sacrifices so that we use that, which they used for sin, in order to serve God. In this way, says the Rambam, there can be a cure for the ‘sickness of the soul’ by going to the opposite extreme. After quoting the Rambam, the Ramban launches a number of criticisms on this approach. We will focus on one of those criticisms.

The Ramban says that according to the Rambam’s idea, there won’t be a ‘cure’ but rather it will be even more harmful to bring sacrifices, because the idea of the idolaters was that these animals have power so they were used in worship. Now, the Jews are going to give honor to this belief by using those very animals in the worship to God! The best way would have been to eat it for ourselves, when it was forbid-

den to them, in order to show how stupid are their beliefs! (At a later point, we will attempt to defend and explain the idea and meaning of the Rambam)

After rejecting the Rambam’s reasoning, the Ramban continues with his own explanation of the institution of Temple sacrifices. He explains that God obligates a person to bring a sacrifice after he sins in order so that he should reflect that really it is his own body and blood that should be spilled and burned, if not for the kindness of the Creator who accepts the animal as a replacement.

A bit of elaboration is needed to clearly grasp the idea of the Ramban. According to the Ramban, the idea behind the bringing of sacrifices is repentance. People have a sense of identification with animals, seen in human remorse in killing animals. By a sacrifice, the person realizes that what is being done to the animal should really be done to him, bringing about the recognition of the person’s own evil state. This is a means to the process of repentance and removal of one’s own sin.

We may now explain the element of Avodah in our Mishna, using the idea of the Ramban. Avodah refers to sacrifices and the idea of sacrifices according to the Ramban is repentance. In the framework of maintaining society, repentance is essential in that it reflects man’s ability to evaluate his own actions. Repentance is a constant process that allows a person to examine his actions and emotions, as he strives to discern if he is following the path of the instinctual towards destruction.

What about today when we don’t have sacrifices? How is this element achieved so that the “world stands”? Our Rabbis say that one who learns through the laws of sacrifices is considered as if he brought the sacrifice himself. Also, we mention sacrifices in our prayers. The idea is that although we no longer have the benefit of the actions of sacrifices, we still maintain the benefits of sacrifices through our awareness and study of them. When one studies the laws of sacrifices and sees the wisdom contained in them, he too has access to the benefits of the institution of sacrifices. In this way, sacrifices continue to exist in the maintenance of our society.

At this point, we are still left to wonder about the position of the Rambam on sacrifices. How can we explain his position and address the criticisms of the Ramban?

To be continued. ■

Torah & Depression

RABBI DANIEL MYERS

It is with quite a bit of trepidation that I write this essay, and I think a word of caution is appropriate. One of the confessions that we enunciate in Vidui is “Yaatznu Ra”, where we ask Hashem for Mechila, forgiveness, for offering bad advice. Are we referring to the wicked person, who purposely offers others misleading guidance? Not necessarily; it is possible to say that this statement refers to a fine individual who wants nothing more than to help his fellow Jew; however, he offers advice in an area, which is not his expertise. Despite his good intentions, he should have been humble enough to admit that he is simply ill equipped to offer help in such an area. Rabbi Abraham J. Twerski writes: “A Rabbi who has not formally learned the requisite skills of counseling comes to depend upon his personal attributes alone (intuition, empathy, sensitivity, life experience, and native intelligence.) These are certainly important components of good counseling and need to be part of the Rabbi’s repertoire, but they alone are not sufficient. Basic counseling skills must be acquired.” (A Practical Guide to Rabbinic Counseling p.15 of preface) It is with this in mind that I share a few thoughts about so sensitive a topic, one that is not my expertise. I hope that I could offer a few limited insights from a Rabbinic perspective based on ideas culled from our Baalai Mesorah, life experience, and other sources as well.

A most crucial question that must be addressed when dealing with the topic of depression is the following: According to the Torah, is depression a physical phenomena, a psychological malady, a spiritual illness, or something else altogether? Let us take a look at various Rabbinic statements regarding this topic. Rav Akiva Tatz Shlita writes: “There is no negativity in the moment of new creation. While the energy of creativity is flowing, depression and despair are impossible. The spiritual root of depression is lack of growth in the personality. When time ticks away and nothing new is being built, when all is static, the soul feels the cold hand of death. The sadness of the end of

life is that activity is no longer possible, no change can be generated, and all is frozen. That is the essential difference between life and its opposite, and a soul has a premonition of that final state when it is inactive in this world. This is a great secret in the understanding of depression, and this is the reason that the cure for depression is activity; at first, any purposeful activity, but leading as soon as possible to activity of the soul, the movement of growth.” According to Rav Tatz, one’s spiritual stagnancy is a major cause of depression.

Others approach depression from a different angle: Rav Aryeh Ackerman, director of 12 Steps to Self Esteem, writes: “Your emotions exist in order to motivate you to take an action. Guilt signals one to change, pain signals one to care for oneself, and boredom, depression or anxiety, signals oneself to bring about a change. Many people experiencing emotional or behavioral difficulties, who seek psychiatric treatment for depression, have been depressed for most of their life as result of their negative self-image. Anti-depressant medications will usually not help these people. Instead of the therapist trying to figure out what is wrong with the client, he may try to point to the client what is right with him. The Torah gives intrinsic meaning to all life regardless of what he can or has achieved. Self-esteem and happiness are interdependent. Hope is to joy what despair is to depression. According to Rav Ackerman, there is a strong connection between one’s self esteem and his vulnerability to depression.

A third approach is apparent according to Rav Twerski. He writes: “It is of interest to note the historical perspective of depression. The common term in Torah literature, and that which the Rambam uses, is Morah Shechorah, which literally means “black bile.” This term derives from the ancient physiological concept that there are four “humors” or liquid substances flowing throughout the human body. There are the white bile, the yellow bile, the red bile and the black bile. According to ancient theory, a person is in good

health when all four humors are in proper balance, each existing in the appropriate proportion. If this delicate balance is in any way upset, the result is illness. Depression occurs when there is a disproportionate excess of the black bile, hence the term Marah Shechora for depression. This ancient terminology carried over to modern English, which still retains the term “melancholia” (melan=black, chole=bile) for depression. In the mid-19th century there was a marked shift in thought about the origin of depression and this was accentuated by Sigmund Freud and his disciples.

Freud is most famous for his elaboration of theory of the theory of the unconscious mind, and the effects of unconscious thought on feeling and behavior. There is certainly a great deal of evidence to support the concept that there are ideas which reside in the unconscious portion of the mind, ideas of which a person is unaware, and that these can have a profound effect on one’s thoughts and actions. For example, it is commonly observed that when a person suffers a loss of any kind it is often followed by sadness or depression. Thus, the rather frequent occurrence of depression in the postmenopausal woman was explained as being due to the woman’s incontrovertible evidence that she had lost a characteristic of youth. Inasmuch as normal life is often punctuated by adversities of various sorts, it was not too difficult to assign the occurrence of any depression to some sort of unpleasant circumstance or loss that the person has experienced. While there is little doubt that some depressions may indeed be a reaction to a loss, the generalization that all depressions are due to a loss, perceived unconsciously if not consciously, seems to be stretching things a bit. This uniform theory of depression began to be challenged in the late 1950s. During that decade, the first truly effective medication for treatment of high blood pressure, a derivative of a plant, rauwolfia, was introduced in the United States. While the drug was highly effective in lowering blood pressure, it had a number of unpleasant side effects, one of which

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Psychology

was that it could produce severe depression. The depression caused by rauwolfia was in every way similar to the depressive illnesses that psychiatrists had been seeing for ages. It thus became evident that chemical changes within the body can produce depression. The position of the Rambam and the ancients was essentially vindicated: depression can be, and very often is, due to a chemical imbalance within the body, and is not necessarily the result of a loss or other psychological cause. (Getting Up When You're Down p.16-18) According to Rav Twerski, although depression can be caused by stress and loss, it is often brought on solely by chemical changes in the body.

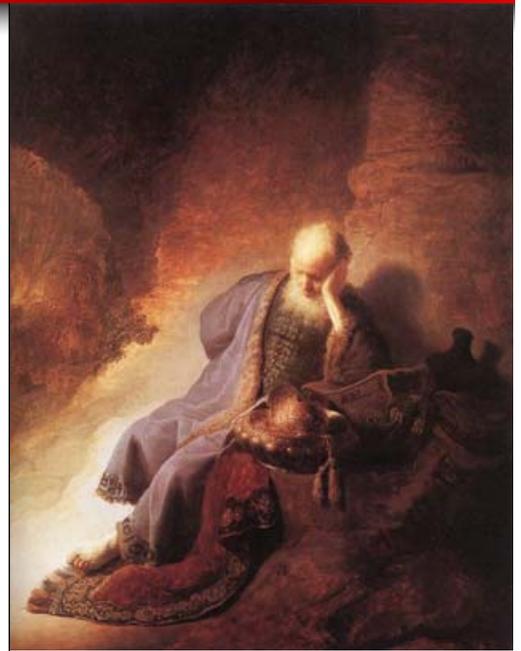
We see that the Rabbis attribute depression to spiritual, emotional or chemical sources. The fact is, that the human psyche is quite complicated, and there are many factors that may lead to depression. Often, it is difficult to assess the cause of the malady because the sufferer is embarrassed by his affliction, considering emotions as something, which should be under his control, and an emotional issue such as depression is a sign of weakness. (Regarding the complexity of depression, see The Science Times 18/10/05 p.1 "Can Brain Scans Detect Depression? Not Yet.")

In addition to the previous issues, something else should be taken into account as well. Fatigue, irritability, lack of concentration and loss of interest in enjoyable activities are common symptoms of depression. These symptoms are also symptoms of obstructive sleep apnea, which is a disorder that occurs when the tongue or throat muscles relax too much during sleep and block the airway. In one study, many individuals who showed signs of depression were treated for sleep apnea for four to six weeks. Many of them showed decreases in their depression scores, as well as a marked improvement in measures of daytime sleepiness. (Science Times 20/9/05 p.7) As a matter of fact, many therapists tell their clients who suffer from depression that whenever they begin to feel down, they should take the H.A.L.T. approach, which means that the clients should try to assess if the trigger for their blues is that they are Hungry, Angry, Lonely or Tired. Some compare depression to a flashlight in one's mind, which only shines on the individual's (perceived) depressing aspects of life. Therefore, encouraging the client to recognize possible catalysts before the flashlight becomes focused on the gloom may be helpful.

Once we realize the complexities of depression, it is crucial that we react to one suffering from bouts of depression in a truly Jewish manner. Chazal have given us guidelines for all areas of life, and for this as well. First of all, we must embrace the Mishna in Pirkai Azoth (2:5) "Al Tadin Et Chavaircha Ad Shetagia Limkomo," one

can not judge his friend until he has reached his place. Until an individual experiences- physically, spiritually, mentally, and physically – the pain, anger, rage, sadness, etc. that his friend is feeling – he simply cannot understand his friend's challenges and the way that the latter deals with those challenges. Any assessment based purely on one's mind without recourse to a similar emotional experience must, by definition, miss the mark; one's mind simply cannot comprehend another's emotions. Therefore, when a friend is depressed and does not want to get up, deal with life, go to Shiur, work, etc., one must be careful not to project his feelings onto the sufferer, callously assuming that he should simply "snap out of it" or "get with the program." (We are not referring to one who is simply being lazy, and may be in need of some well-deserved Musar. A good parent, friend, teacher, Rebbe or relative must wisely differentiate – with professional help, if necessary – between depression, "the blues" and laziness.) One who takes such an approach may unintentionally cause feelings of abandonment and grief to his friend. As Ivov cried out in pain, regarding his friends: "My brothers have betrayed me like a seasonal watercourse, they shift like the flow of streams, tucking themselves under ice, hidden under concealing snow." (Iyov 6:15,16)

The Halacha dictates how to act when one's friend is in pain: The Baalai Mesorah actually delineated a few different states of one who is suffering: Regarding an Onain, the Mishna in Pirkai Avoth (4:18) states: "Do not console your fellow while he is an Onain, when his deceased relative is lying before him." The Tiferet Yisrael (ibid.) writes that the Onain will be in Zaar, pain, if he sees that his friend is consoling him instead of grieving with him. (The Tosfoth Yom Tov (ibid.) adds that this restriction applies even to one consoling an Avail, not just an Onain, if the former is in a state of Anacha, intense crying.) Once a person is an Avail, there is no longer a restriction to console the individual; on the contrary, there is a Mitzvah of Nichum Availim. Nevertheless, the Halacha dictates that the Minachaim must follow the lead of the Avail. If the Avail does not want to talk, then the consolers should remain silent, if the Avail indicates that he wants to be alone, then the consolers must leave. (Shulchan Aruch Yoreh Daiah 376:1) The Halacha also states that the Minachaim should be together with the Avail in his Availut; therefore, he should sit on the floor with the Avail, and is not allowed to sit anywhere else. (Shulchan Aruch Yoreh Daiah 387:1. See Taz 387:1 regarding the Minhag today not to sit on the floor with the Avail.) Obviously, we are not dealing with Availut here; nevertheless, we are dealing with a fellow Jew who is suffering, and there is much to be derived from Hilchot Availut.



What do we learn from these Halachot? That when a friend is suffering, sometimes we must suffer silently with him, and at other times we must suffer vocally and actively with him. The comfort may come in various forms, depending on the state of the afflicted. A good friend will try his best to understand his friend's mood and assess what form, if any, the consoling should take. Usually, affection (emotional and physical, when acceptable) is very helpful, telling the sufferer how much he is loved and needed, confirming his uniqueness and indispensability, which is so crucial at a time when he may feel otherwise. At times, our friend may simply want to feel "Emo Anochee V'Zarah," (Tehillim 91) that we are with him in his distress, and would prefer silence over the spoken word. Or, he may find consolation in Pesukim of Tehillim, such as: "Favor me, Hashem, for I am feeble, heal me, Hashem, for my bones shudder with terror" (6:3), and "Why, Hashem, do You stand aloof, do You conceal Yourself in times of distress?" (10:1) where he can identify with David Hamelech, who also experienced much pain, calling out to Hashem, pleading respectfully but passionately, for help. Sometimes guarded optimism is appropriate, such as "you got through this last time, I am confident that this will pass too," at other times, a more upbeat approach may be suitable, redirecting his mental flashlight from the gloom to the good, trying to help him focus on all the gifts that he has been blessed with. The bottom line is that a true friend will be genuine, understanding, sympathetic and empathetic; then, and only then, will he decide the appropriate next response.

May Hashem grant us all the strength to deal with life's challenges, overcome them, and, ultimately, become better human beings from them. ■