

The Gold Calf worshippers did not think the Calf was God, but a mere force of sorts. Regardless, God killed them. Therefore, a far worse sin is the Christian tenet that man is somehow part of God. Accepting such a belief, and certainly teaching it, must also render such a person's God-given life meaningless, and destructive.



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**Weekly Parsha**

# Vayakhel

RABBI BERNARD FOX

"Every man whose heart lifted him came forward. And every person whose heart moved him brought the offering of Hashem for the creating of the Ohel Moed, all of its components and the sacred garments." (Shemot 35:21)

Hashem commanded Bnai Yisrael to build a Mishcan – a Tabernacle.

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# JEW or GENTILE: ONE AUTHENTIC REVELATION

RABBI REUVEN MANN

Rabbi, Rinat Yisrael, Plainview, NY  
Written by student

Earlier this month on Tuesday March 7, Yeshiva Chovavay Torah invited Rabbi Yitz Greenburg to speak about his controversial views regarding "Pluralism" and inter-faith relations. Also invited to speak was Rabbi Reuven Mann to represent a traditional Orthodox Jewish perspective on the themes addressed by Rabbi Greenburg. The following is a brief synopsis of Rabbi Mann's speech by one of his students.

Chazal tell us that engaging in Torah study is like a pitched, no-holds-barred battle for the truth

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**"B'tzelem Elohim", "in the form of God" refers to intellect. Judaism recognizes Gentiles as equals, possessing the identical, God-given soul, as God states**

(Vayakhel cont. from pg. 1)

## Weekly Parsha

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The Mishcan was constructed from materials provided and contributed by Bnai Yisrael. Our pasuk describes the response of the nation to Moshe's request to supply these materials. In his comments on this passage, Rabbaynu Yonatan ben Uziel explains that the craft-people who build the Mishcan were guided by the spirit of prophecy.[1] Why did they require this spirit of prophecy to perform their tasks? In order to answer this question, we must identify and understand a fundamental paradox within the commandment to build the Mishcan.

One of the interesting issues that is discussed repeatedly in the Talmud is whether we can rely on the accuracy of measurements. Let us consider a simple case that illustrates this issue. On Succot we are required to live in a succah. The most fundamental element of a succah is its roof. The roof must be composed of branches or a similar substance. We cannot use a metal poles or even wooden poles that have been manufactured to the extent that they are regarded as vessels. The Mishne discusses a succah whose sechach – roof is composed of a combination of suitable and unsuitable material. The two materials are placed on the roof in an alternating pattern so that the quantity of the suitable material is exactly equal to the unsuitable material. The Mishne rules that this succah is acceptable. The Talmud observes that according to some authorities in order for a structure to be regarded as a succah only half of its roof must be covered with suitable sechach. A majority of the roof need not be covered with suitable sechach. Apparently, the Mishne supports this position. The implication of this discussion is that if we assume that we cannot rely on the exactness of the measurements of the two substances, the structure could not be regarded decisively as a suitable succah. This is because we could not be sure that the suitable sechach is exactly equal in quantity to the unsuitable material.[2]

In short, the Sages disagree as to whether we can assume that measurements are exact. Some Sages maintain that we can make this assumption. Others argue that we cannot make such an assumption. If we assume that measurements can be exact, then the structure described in the Mishne is a suitable succah, without qualification. However, if we assume that measurements cannot be regarded as exact, then the structure would not be suitable unless a marginal quantity of sechach is added. This additional quantity of sechach would assure that – in fact – the sechach was at least equal to the unsuitable substance.

The same dispute extends to the measurement of events as being simultaneous. The Sages that contend that measurements can be regarded as exact, also assert that we can assume that two events that appear simultaneous actually have

occurred at the same moment. The Sages that do not accept measurements as being exact, also deny that two apparently simultaneous events can be regarded as truly having occurred at the same moment.

At first glance, this dispute seems difficult to understand. It is empirically evident that it is remarkably difficult to exactly measure any quantity. Even if a measurement seems to be exact, more careful examination will indicate that it is not. Certainly, it is nearly impossible to conclude that two events are precisely simultaneous. Therefore, it would seem that the more reasonable position is to assume that measurements are not exact.

We can gain an insight into this dispute through another discussion in the Talmud. The Talmud in Tractate Bechorot attempts to resolve the dispute between the Sages on this issue. The Talmud suggests that the dispute can be resolved through considering the Torah's commandment to build a Mishcan. The Torah provides exact measurements for each of the elements of the Mishcan. Precise dimensions are delineated for the Aron – the ark, the Shulchan – the Table that held the Shew Bread, and every other component of the Mishcan. The builders of the Mishcan were required to build the components to these exact specifications. They could not deviate from any of the specified dimensions. The Talmud asserts that this proves that we can rely on the precision of measurements! However, the Talmud rejects this proof. It explains that it is true that the Torah commands us to build a Mishcan and provides exact dimensions. However, the dimensions described by the Torah were not precisely achieved. Instead, the builders did their best to construct the Mishcan and its components according to these dimensions. However, because of the innate imperfection of any human measurement, they were not successful.[3]

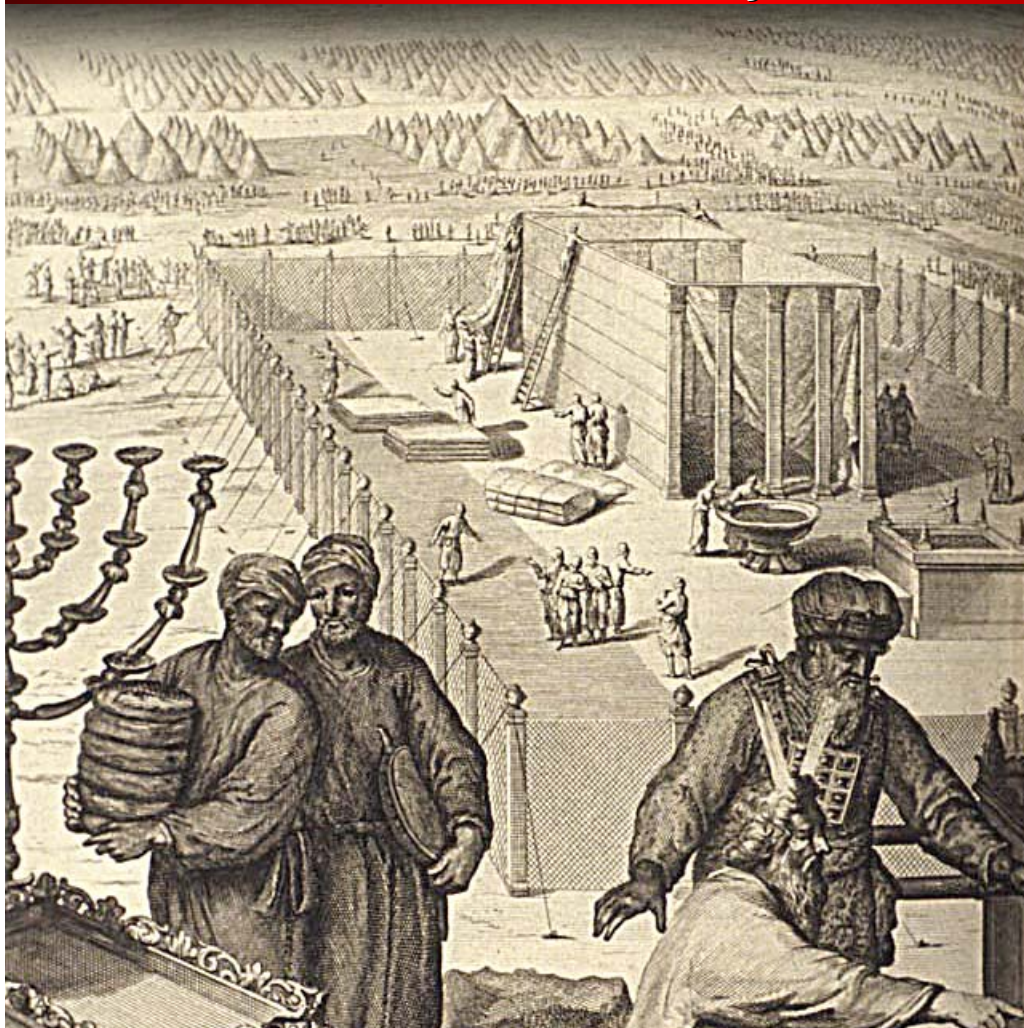
This discussion is difficult to understand. The Talmud's discussion begins by assuming that the Torah required the Mishcan to be built to precise measurements. This is offered as a proof to the opinion that measurements can be regarded as precise. However, as explained above, it is virtually impossible to make an exact measurement. How can the Torah command us to perform the impossible?

This question suggests an important insight into the Sages' dispute regarding the precision of measurements. As we have explained, the Mishcan presents a paradox. We were required to build the Mishcan according to exact specifications. Yet, precise measurement is virtually impossible! There are two obvious approaches to resolving this paradox.

One possibility is that the dimensions outlined in the Torah represent targets. They are impossible to

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precisely achieve but in constructing the Mishkan the builders were provided with a model towards which they were required to strive. The actual Mishkan was not an exact embodiment of this model. It is the closest possible actualization of the model.

The second possible resolution of this paradox is that the specifications must be achieved. An approximation is not adequate. However, the Torah accepts an empirical standard for all measurements. In other words, if a measurement is empirically met, the Torah regards the measurement as precise.

Let us now return to the discussion in the Talmud. The Talmud initially asserts that the requirement to build the Mishkan and its components to exact specifications indicates that we can rely on the precision of measurements. This proof can now be understood. The proof is based upon the assumption that the Torah's standard of measurement is empirical. If the builders of the Mishkan carefully measured their work and all of their empirical measurements indicated that the design specifications had been met, then the standard of measurement was satisfied. In other word, if empirical measurement indicated that the

Mishkan had been build exactly to specification, then according to the Torah's standards the Mishkan was regarded as built exactly according to its specifications.

However, the Talmud rejects this argument. It suggests that – in fact – empirical measurements are not regarded as precise. Instead, in providing exact specifications for the Mishkan, the Torah created design targets. The Torah recognizes that these targets cannot be precisely achieved. However, it is not necessary to precisely achieve these specifications. They are a target. The Mishkan was acceptable because it was the closes possible embodiment of the required dimensions.

This analysis provides an explanation of the dispute between the Sages. The Sages recognize that it is virtually impossible to achieve precise measurements. The Sages that contend that measurements can be regarded as exact do not dispute this issue. However, they contend that in establishing measurements the Torah only requires that the measurements be met to an empirical level of precision. When the measurement has been empirically achieved, the Torah's requirement is satisfied. However, the Sages who maintain that precision is impossible, argue that the measure-

ments of the Torah are exact requirements that cannot be satisfied at an empirical level of precision. If this is the case, they must assume that Torah's specifications for the Mishkan are intended as design targets but not absolute standards.

The Talmud offers another resolution of the paradox of the Mishkan. The resolution is quite enigmatic. It consists of a passage from Divrei HaYamim – Chronicles. King David instructed his son Shlomo to build the Bait HaMikdash – the Temple. He provided Shlomo with precise instructions. He explained to Shlomo that he was providing him with precise written instructions that he – David – had received from Hashem through prophecy.[4],[5]

The Talmud does not comment on the passage or explain its relevance to the paradox. However, Rav Yitzchak Zev Soloveitchik – the GRI"Z – offers an interesting explanation of the Talmud's comments. He suggests that although it is virtually impossible to make a measurement with exact precision, it is innately impossible. In attempting to make a precise measurement we are typically defeated by the imprecision of our measuring tools and the limitations of the human senses. However, if these limitations can be overcome, a precise measurement is possible. Based on this assertion, the GRI"Z explains the Talmud's comments. David told Shlomo that he had received through prophecy exact specifications for the Bait HaMikdash. He assured Shlomo that the building of the Bait HaMikdash would be guided by the same Divine inspiration. Through this inspiration they would achieve a level of perfect precision not normally possible.

According to the GRI"Z, the Talmud is suggesting that even the Sages that maintain that exact precision is normally impossible to achieve would acknowledge that the Mishkan and its components were built with exact precision. They too were guided in their efforts by Divine inspiration. This guidance enabled them to achieve a level of precision that is normally not attainable.

We can now understand Rabbaynu Yonatan ben Uziel's comments on our passage. The craftspeople who build the Mishkan required the spirit of prophecy in order to complete their task. This spirit of prophecy guided them and assured their success in achieving the precise specifications required for the Mishkan and its components.[6] ■

[1] Rabbaynu Yonatan ben Uziel, Targum on Sefer Shemot 35:21.

[2] Mesechet Succah 15a – 15b.

[3] Mesechet Bechorot 17b.

[4] Sefer Divrei HaYamim I, 28:19.

[5] Mesechet Bechorot 17b.

[6] Rav Y. Herschkowitz, Netivit Rabotaynu (Jerusalem 5762), volume 1, pp. 415-416.

*Whether as a Jew observing  
his 613 Commandments,  
or as a Gentile, keeping at  
least their 7 Commandments  
(Gentiles may voluntarily  
accept upon themselves virtually  
all of the 613 if they so desire),  
all of mankind should use their  
free will and rational faculty  
(Tzelem Elokim, "image of  
God") as the sole guide in their  
approach to serving  
their Creator.*

where it is not uncommon to see a two good friends arguing almost like complete strangers, and yet by the time they leave the Bais Medrash one way or the other they leave the best of friends. It is in that spirit that I wish to present the views of Rabbinical Judaism on tonight's theme of "Pluralism" even when they may differ sharply from those of Rabbi Greenburg.

Rabbi Greenburg has criticized what he characterizes as "Absolutist" religious views as a non-Torah approach that leads to bigotry, denigration and as he correctly pointed out severe persecution of any and all who differ with one's "Absolutist" views. I would however like to make a distinction between two different types of "Absolutist" views. The first is one of man-made religion, the other of Godly revelation. When one studies any of the many man-made religions one must be struck by the common need they seem to have to proselytize (whether with honey or vinegar) to the rest of the world – a triumphalism of sorts. They are all driven by a need to authenticate themselves by the approval of the masses to help substitute for their lack of any other kind of verification, like that which Judaism possesses – that of verifiable mass revelation. For these religions it is indeed necessary to put down all others who do not conform to the truth they claim to have, as they are insecure themselves as to the veracity of their own faith.

Judaism on the other hand, as exemplified by our progenitor and forefather Abraham, shows us how one should in fact relate to others not convinced of the validity of the revelation at Sinai. Abraham went against his entire world, rejecting their idolatry for the One, true God. However it was not religious emotion or "faith" that drove our forefather to arrive at the most profound and world shattering discovery man has ever been privileged to unearth from the beautiful world around him. Rather, it was his rational faculty that guided Abraham through every stage of his investigation and led him to the idea of monotheism. It was only with this approach, that of mind over emotion, that Abraham could confidently, resolutely and without a need for the approval of the masses, declare all other approaches as falsehoods. That said, it was Abraham – the "absolutist of absolutists" – who was also the paradigm of loving-kindness and respect for his fellow Man. Was it not Abraham who ran to the travelers outside his tent on the third day since his circumcision to offer them his hospitality? Was it not Abraham who displayed the utmost sensitivity when he offered his guests water to wash themselves before entering his tent (so

that they should not bring in the dust on their feet which they worshiped) in an unconflictual and respectful manner? Yet this is the same Abraham who unabashedly declared all prevalent religions of his time false, and all its supposed prophets' charlatans!

One must always use the mind as the final and sole arbiter in determining the correct religion. It was this approach, which Moses demonstrated at the burning bush when he asked God both what "name" (ideas about God) he should say sent him and for what "reason" (signs) the people should believe he was a true Prophet sent by God. Moses understood that even in the desperate plight as slaves in Egypt the Jews would require proof that he was a legitimate savior. What other world leader ever bothered with "proving" himself to such a desperate group of people?

We see further that this standard in no way limits itself to Jews, as the Torah tells us repeatedly through the signs and wonders preformed in Egypt the Egyptians (the world) would come to know God. And again in connection with the Golden Calf, Moses' arguments to God to spare the people, concerned what "Egypt would say about God" by ascribing weakness to him, saying God could only take them out of Egypt but was not strong enough to bring them into the land of Israel. We see that the Torah is concerned that all mankind achieve a proper understanding of God, whether that ultimate objective is accomplished through the 613 Commandments or the 7 Noachide Laws: there is only one religious truth that applies to all people. This is clearly so, as all people were created in the "image" of God and partake of the same essence, the divine soul.

However as the Rambam points out in his Mishneh Torah (code of Jewish Law) in the section on the Fundamentals of Torah it was not through miracles that the Jews became convinced of the veracity of Moses' prophecy, as miracles lend themselves to doubt and eventual rejection. Rather, it was only through the mass revelation at Mt. Sinai where the entire people heard the "voice" of God from amidst the fire. It was through this alone that the people believed forever and with out any doubt in God and his prophet Moses.

The Torah itself proclaims that it is eternal, i.e. that it will never be abrogated by any other law as it says, "It was revealed to us and our sons until forever to do all the words of this Torah (Deuteronomy 29:28)." In addition the Torah tells us that it is perfect and may not be altered in any way, either through addition or subtraction, as the pasuk tells us, "Every matter that I have commanded you about it to guard

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and do, you may not add upon it or subtract from it (Deuteronomy 13:1).” Even further, the Torah states that it is exclusive, that it is the only revelation that God will give to mankind, “It (the Torah) is not in heaven (Deuteronomy 30:12).”

Thus any claim that God wants to abolish replace or in any way alter the Torah with any other alternative system of law, is by definition contrary to the Torah and automatically false. Anyone bearing such a message and claiming to be a prophet is immediately rejected and denounced as a false prophet (and executed). It would not matter if that false prophet preformed even the most impressive miracles to verify his claim because miracles cannot authenticate that which we know to be false. The Torah itself tells us that it is entirely possible that a false prophet’s claim could be accompanied by miracles, “Do not hearken to the words of that prophet or to that dreamer of a dream, for HaShem your God is testing you to know whether you love HaShem your God with all your heart and all your soul (Deuteronomy 13:4).” In fact the Torah expressly states in the pasuk previously quoted that if such an event were to ever occur, where a false prophet preformed miracles in an attempt to authenticate himself, that this would be a test (“menaseh”) from God to see if we are secure in the foundations of our emunah (belief). For example, what if someone claimed that the Holocaust never occurred and to prove it, he told the world that he would return the World Trade Center towers to lower Manhattan – exactly as they were – with all of those killed, waiting to greet their loved

one’s...and he performed that astounding miracle?! (This is entirely possible according to Torah, as Resurrection will occur). However, would such a miraculous demonstration cause anyone to doubt that Holocaust indeed occurred? Anyone who would accept something he knows to be false because of the “miraculous”, would be in denial of a fundamental principle of Torah: miracles cannot disprove truths.

It is with this set of standards that the Torah-oriented man approaches all claims of Divine revelation – be they from a Jew or Gentile. It is with this set of standards that one can know with certainty that Christianity for example is surely false. For one, Jesus passed none of the requirements of a prophet (as mandated by Halacha, Jewish Law) let alone Messiah, be they his personal stature or even the signs by which we could verify his prophecy or Messianic candidacy (see Rambam in his section on Kings and the Fundamentals of Torah for these requirements). But the point of most significance is that even had Jesus met and passed every relevant test, the moment he abolished a single ordinance of the Law exposed him as the charlatan he was.

I would add further that when one also considers the claim that “Jesus was God Himself” or that “God could be killed” any rational person would know immediately that he is dealing with a charlatan. Nothing is more absurd or offensive to reason than the Christian notion of “deicide.” Our concept of God is that He the only true existence, He exists by nature and is the sole source of the existence of everything else. Thus says the Rambam (in the

Fundamentals of Torah Ch.1) if we could imagine that He did not exist, then nothing else could exist. However, if everything else were to cease to exist He alone would exist, as everything else requires God. God however, is a completely independent existence.

Therefore the notion of “deicide,” of man “killing” God reflects a complete lack of any serious concept of the Creator of the universe, and is in fact the most perverse thought that could enter into the human mind. Yet the sheer absurdity of the “crime” did not prevent Christians from severely persecuting, to the point of mass murder, the Jews throughout history. I would ask the following to those Christians who posit this notion of deicide: “Did we kill God? Is He dead? If so, then there is no God and not much to argue about. Or if you prefer to say that God is still ‘alive’ and that we didn’t succeed in ‘killing’ Him, then it would seem only fair to reduce the charges against Jews to ‘attempted’ murder?”

The point being of course that one must conclude that Christianity and all other man-made religions are fabrications and falsehoods. However that does not mean that it is correct to denigrate or abuse those who have been duped by the biggest con in history. Rather, one should turn to the example of Abraham as we discussed earlier and treat all of mankind with dignity and respect. Man was after all created in “the image of his Creator,” and therefore demands respect as an extension of respect to God Himself. This does not mean however that one can compromise on that which matters most and refuse to call a lie a “lie”.

The approach of Torah is to live according to the Law that God gave to mankind at Mt. Sinai. Whether as a Jew, one observes his 613 Commandments, or as a Gentile, keeping at least their 7 Commandments (Gentiles may voluntarily accept upon themselves virtually all of the 613 if they so desire). All of mankind should use their free will and rational faculty (Tzelem Elokim, “image of God”) as the sole guide in their approach to serving their Creator. The ideal model for mankind is one where all of man-kind recognize, not as an article of faith but as a resolute point of conviction, the Oneness of God and observe His Law, the practice of which is to be dictated by God’s designated teachers. This is the national destiny that the Torah referred to at Mt. Sinai when God charged the people of Israel to become a “kingdom of priests and holy nation.” It is only then the Torah tells us that the world will say, “truly this is a wise and discerning nation.” ■

# Pluralism

## *Judaism's Rejection of All Other Religions*

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

Two weeks ago in New York City, Rabbi Reuven Mann and Rabbi Yitz Greenburg delivered individual addresses to Columbia University collegiates and a communal body of Jews concerned to understand Orthodox Judaism's position on "pluralism". Rabbi Greenburg was the presenter of his "pluralistic Judaism", and Rabbi Reuven Mann was invited to present a rejoinder.

Rabbi Greenburg defined "pluralism" in this context, as referring to the "equal recognition of one religionist, by another". An example would be a Christian who equally recognizes Judaism, validating "multiple paths to God", where both religions possess God's inspiration and Divine Revelation. The question addressed by these two Rabbis, was whether Judaism equally recognizes Christianity's claim of Divine origin.

### Pluralism Supported: Rabbi Greenburg

Rabbi Yitz Greenburg presented first with his arguments: "Judaism must recognize that God inspired Christianity; that Christianity possesses praiseworthy tenets; and that Jews must treat Christians peaceably. I cannot accept that only a few million Jews live correctly, while the remainder of the world's 6 billion will go to hell." Rabbi Greenburg supported the merits of Christianity based on Christian care shelters in third world countries that attract successful businessmen to leave their riches, and care for their deformed infants. Such acts of kindness – he claimed – endorse Christianity as a Divine religion. He said he learned much from such acts of kindness, reforming him from his view of Christians as people with little to teach him, to a people with much to offer, and members of a "Divinely inspired" religion. Rabbi Greenburg said he also learned much from Christians during his interfaith dialogues and interactions over the years. He said, "It is garish and grotesque to feel one (read "a Jew") has all the answers, and that others are wrong." He cited some of today's orthodox Jews who proliferate this sentiment that other religions are "sub-human".

### Pluralism Denied: Rabbi Mann

Rabbi Reuven Mann then commenced his position on pluralism. He started, citing the principle of

"Vahave B'Sufa" (Num. 21:14) a cryptic reference to the love ("vahave" = love) experienced at the end of the Jews' travels ("sufa" = end). Rabbi Mann equated that reference to the need for all debates to conclude as well in love, that no animosity should exist or remain after heated discussions. Torah discussions and studies demand that all egos be "checked at the door", and are about searching for truth, not personalities. Rabbi Mann wished to preserve peaceable discussions, without compromising a search for the truth. He later praised Rabbi Greenburg's willingness to openly present his views.

Rabbi Mann discussed the need to separate personal preferences and beliefs, from the search for truth. Thus, a falsehood spoken by a compassionate person is no truer, than a falsehood spoken by a liar. He went on to isolate the phenomena of "faith" in all religions outside Judaism. He described the manner in which faith is an automatic, a blindly accepted means where one assumes he is in line with a true system. But this, Rabbi Mann said, is baseless; as it is impossible to automatically know what God is, or if one is in line with His will, unless God communicates this. He explained how no other religion claims Divine Revelation, and therefore, all claims of possessing God's word must be false.

Rabbi Mann commented on the absence in the world's religions of any prescribed means to approach God. It is assumed by other religionists that any imagined means, might lead them to God. Such a religious creed is false, as are all other human



imaginations. Now, due to the falsehood of this first mistake, other religions follow with another error: proselytizing. Rabbi Mann explained that Judaism does not proselytize others, as we have the truth, and observe the protection of each individual's right to choose, all religionists included. Imposition is not the Jewish way. But other religions are insecure about their systems, since the truly know they have no basis or defense of their tenets, as all is based on blind faith. Thus, Judaism presents a threat, and religions like Christianity and Islam respond, resorting to Jihads and Crusades, where "triumph" is their barometer of veracity. Of course, this is foolish, as triumphs merely reflect military prowess, and not validity of religious positions.

Conversely, Abraham used intelligent arguments to help others. He was compassionate for all peoples, not viewing himself any greater, and serviced others

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(Pluralism continued from previous page)

by waiting on them, providing meals to wayfarers, and taking his precious time to educate them on true philosophical truths, while exposing the harms and fallacies of idolatry in a gentle manner. This is the way of Judaism. As Jeremiah states, “be wise and know Me.” (Jer. 9:23) God states that wisdom is the only path to Him...not imagined feelings, or crusades on innocents. Moses too followed Abraham’s methods, claiming the Jews would not believe him without proof. (Exod. 4:1) Therefore, God gave Moses miracles to convey that God did in fact select Moses. God endorsed Moses’ correct thinking, that intelligent proofs accompany all claims.

But miracles must be understood, and the miracles at Mount Sinai, more than all others. We do not follow miracles unless they prove a truth. For example, if someone was to create a miracle, resurrecting the Twin Towers and all who perished, simultaneously claiming the Holocaust never transpired, we would not agree with his historical revisionism, despite his fantastic miracle. So too, we would not give any credence to Jesus, had he performed any miracle, (which were never substantiated) while instructing man to violate God’s words. Miracles serve to validate a truth, but do not create impossibilities or endorse lies.

God’s revelation on Mount Sinai was, and remains, a phenomenon unique throughout all history. No time before or after has God created a mass revelation, giving man a religion. God’s very commands (Deut. 13:1) “The entire matter which I command to you, it shall you guard; do not add to it, and do not detract from it” attest to God’s will to never inspire any other religion. So many Torah verses also repeat the idea of the eternal and exclusive nature of Torah.

No religion but Judaism possesses this claim of Divine Revelation before masses. And oddly enough, other religions retain this story in their books as a truth. But Sinai was not a miracle to validate something else, but a miracle to introduce a new truth: that God selected one people, and gave them one law, and He did so in plain sight of millions so as to survive all generations as an everlasting truth. Any other miracle performed by a charlatan, claiming any part of the Torah is false, by definition, is of no concern to us. A miracle cannot deny historical truths, and also, no miracles are recorded by other religions...they merely purport the words of the few, which are inconclusive. Sinai remains the exclusive event in world history where God gave a religion to man, and where that event, thousands of years later, remains proven. This is why Judaism is accepted as God’s true and only religion, and all others are imposters.

God’s Torah is eternal, and God said to never add or subtract to it. All Jewish prophets came only to admonish the Jews to observe the Torah, and never once altered a word.

Rabbi Mann concluded with his genuine concern

for the current state of affairs of world Jewry. Jews favor “miracle workers”, amulets, and Rabbis’ blessings, and not God’s methods of wisdom and intelligent proofs taught by Abraham, Moses and all our prophets. Rabbi Mann was emphatic regarding the dire need for Judaism’s fundamental truths to regain optimum focus in schools. It is the absence of these tenets that allows for fallacies as “pluralism” to gain a foothold.

**Commentary:** My reaction is that many Jews do in fact view other religionists as lesser peoples. However, this is wrong, and is not the Torah’s position, as God wills all people exist with intelligence. The very institution of converts proves human equality, as does Talmud Sanhedrin 59a, which states that a Gentile who studies Torah is equal to a High Priest. But we must be clear: this is no way supports the view that other religions are Divinely inspired. Rabbi Greenburg cited Bilaam as “proof” that God inspires other religions. The clear rejection of his claim is that God’s prophecy to Bilaam was for the sake of praising Israel – not to give a new religion. To the contrary, many Torah sources emphatically disprove Rabbi Greenburg’s position.

Last week in Parshas Ki Tisa, Moses says the following (Exod. 33:16,17)

*“And how will it be known that I have found favor in Your site [for] I and my people? Is it not in Your going with us, and in your distinguishing I and my people from all nations on the face of the Earth? And God said to Moses, ‘Also this matter of which you speak, I will do, for you have found favor in My eyes, and I know you by name’.”*

*Rashi: “Also this matter I will do: I will No longer rest My presence on the idolatrous nations. And the words of Bilaam were not through Divine inspiration.”*

The facts are clear: Moses asks that God relate to the Jews exclusively, and God agrees. Rashi also refutes Rabbi Greenburg’s assumption that Bilaam evidenced God’s inspiration for other nations: Bilaam’s “quasi prophecy” was to praise God, Torah, and the Jews.

Before receiving the Torah on Mt. Sinai, God tells Moses to tell the people this (Exod. 19:4-6):

*“You have seen what I have done to Egypt and that I carried you on the wings of eagles, and I brought you to Me. And now, if you surely listen to My voice, and you guard My covenant, then you will be to Me a treasure over all peoples, for Mine is all the Earth. And you will be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation: these are the words that you shall speak to the Children of Israel.”*

Rashi explains these verses (Exod. 19:5):

*“And you shall guard my covenant”: that I make with you on account of your abiding by My Torah.*

*“And you will be a treasure to Me from all other nations”: A beloved treasure, as a treasure room of kings, fine vessels and precious stones which kings store away. So too you will be to Me, a treasure from the rest of the nations. But do not say that you (Israel) alone are Mine, and that I have no others with you. [I, God, treasure all people.] However, what more do I have that My love for you is recognized? ‘For Mine is the entire Earth’, and they are before Me as nothing.”*

Rashi teaches that Israel has nothing more than other nations, “do not say that you (Israel) alone are Mine, and that I have no others with you.” Meaning, all peoples are created equal. So wherefrom is Israel’s “treasured” status? The last part of verse 5 answers this: “For Mine is the entire Earth, and they are before Me as nothing.” “Mine is the entire Earth,” means all peoples are “created” equal. The Jew is treasured only by God’s despising the nations’ idolatry: “they are before Me as nothing” means due to their sin, the Jew is treasured by default...provided we observe God’s laws.

This was an essential lesson before the Jews received the Torah. The Jew sins philosophically, thinking he is better than others. For God did not create “Jew” and “Gentile”, rather, man and woman. All members of mankind share the same ancestors, Adam and Eve. How then can the Jew think he is better? Receiving the Torah on Sinai carried the prospect of the Jews’ haughtiness. These verses intended to correct the problem before it started. However, this only resolves the question as to whether one man is “designed” greater than another. The answer is we are all identical. But this cannot be confused with a completely separate issue: to whom God gave a religion. This latter question Rashi answered: “Also this matter I will do. I will No longer rest My presence on the idolatrous nations. And the words of Bilaam were not through Divine inspiration.” So we conclude: God created all men equal, but gave a religion to the Jews alone.

If this is not clear enough, let us read one more verse (Deut. 4:6). Moses tells the Jews the following:

*“And you shall guard the and do them (the Mitzvos) for they are your wisdom and understanding I the eyes o the nations who will hear all these statutes and state, ‘Truly, what a wise and understanding people is the great nation!’. And what great nation has God close to them as our God, anytime we call to Him?”*

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(Pluralism continued from previous page)

## One Religion

Moses tells the Jews that they have a Torah system at which the other nations will marvel with astonishment. It is clear: the other nations do not possess a system with such perfectly reasonable statutes, nor do they have God so close to them. The fact that the other nations will be so impressed with our system and our God is because they are bereft of both.

After his presentation, during a brief question and answer session, I made two comments and asked one question to Rabbi Greenburg. I disagreed with Rabbi Greenburg that God would not destroy world population sparing only those who follow His Torah, and cited the Flood as proof that masses possess no inherent value, and that God kills Torah violators, regardless of numbers. Here, Rabbi Greenburg incorrectly projected his wishes onto reality, as we know historically, the truth is otherwise. Although Rabbi Greenburg's forgiving nature and soft-spoken approach arouses some sympathy for other religions, such emotional sentiments are dangerous, and also caused the downfall of King Saul. God refused King Saul's further reign due to that very sympathy for the evil king Agag, forerunner of Haman. Here as well, sympathy cannot decide God's word...Torah alone is our guide.

Regarding whether Christian kindness is akin in any measure to God's view in the Torah, Rabbi Reuven Mann later discussed that although visibly similar, Christian kindness must maintain a different and corrupt sense of kindness, since Christian kindness is framed by Christian values: their kindness might even extend to a murderer pleading for mercy. In such a case, Judaism would demand death for a bleeding terrorist, while we witness other religionists hospitalizing the Arafat's of the world, showing mercy to child killers. Although Rabbi Greenburg's argument for Christians who care for deformed children is highly charged with pitiful feelings, we cannot condone a system of kindness, which also medically treats killers. An evaluation of any system demands that all professed beliefs be evaluated, as a collective whole. Therefore, if any system harbors destructive kindness, then the entire system is corrupt. It is difficult for the masses – Jews included – to favor a colder, clearer justice, which generates guilt for feeling negativity toward a group who cares for deformed babies. However, honesty and a clear attachment to God's morality is what God and reason demands. Therefore, our emotions must be ruled by our intelligence, and not the reverse. Many times, it is our feeling of guilt and subsequent reluctance to condemn a group, which causes so many poor and dangerous decisions. Israel's current belief that it can make peace with our venomous enemy is a case and point.

After commenting, I requested of Rabbi Greenburg that he support his claim that Christianity was divinely inspired, as is Judaism. But he did not respond. Once during his delivery, he cited Bilaam as

**Bilaam's prophetic attempt at Balak's request ended up as a praise of Judaism, not the start of some new religion. Rashi denounces Bilaam as obtaining true prophecy, thereby rejecting Rabbi Greenburg's claim that Bilaam embodied proof that God inspires other religions.**



an indication that God gives a divine message to other peoples. But we have dismissed that reasoning already.

Not only did Rabbi Greenburg fail to make any case, but also his position is clearly heretical, for he denies the Torah fundamentals of God giving a religion to man only once, (Exod. 19:9; Deut. 5:19; Maimonides' 8th & 9th Principles) and that we must not learn from the other religions (Deut. 18:9).

After Rabbi Mann's presentation, loyal to Torah verses, and engaging sound reasoning, I am assured he reached others, as one of the students proved with his questions on Rabbi Greenburg's claims, using

Rabbi Mann's proofs as support. I am enthused that Chachamim such as Rabbi Mann exist, sincere individuals concerned that Torah retains its pristine and unique message, synonymous with honesty, truth and wisdom. Rabbi Mann presented Judaism accurately and exactly, as he called it, an "absolutist" system, where pluralism is not possible, since truth is inherently singular.

Judaism and truth do not tolerate dilution, or any compromise whatsoever, as God demanded in His Torah that we not add to, or subtract from His words. No Talmudic Rabbi, Sage or orthodox leader ever claimed that we make any concessions in Torah, regardless of any consideration. Not one Jewish leader entertained pluralism as a Torah notion.

Rabbi Greenburg does not represent Judaism since he is at odds with our Fundamentals. It is worthwhile at this point to review Maimonides' words, (Laws of Idolatry, chap II)

*"Any Jewish heretic (apikores) is no longer Jewish in any measure, and is never received in his repentance, forever." "And the heretics are those who go astray after their heart's thoughts in their foolish words that they state, until they violate the Torah's fundamentals, despicably in spite, with an outstretched hand, and they claim that they are not sinning. It is forbidden to speak with them and to respond upon them with any response at all." (2:5)*

For Rabbi Greenburg to claim he presents "Judaism", simultaneously claiming "God inspired other religions" he commits the very crime of heresy outlined above by Maimonides, as he contradicts God's many words in our precious Torah. I have also heard of other Rabbis following this sin, but thankfully, being forced to retract by the honest masses. It appears that such Rabbis succumb to the need for human approval by placating Christians, than living by honestly and defending truth and God's word.

While Judaism teaches that all men are equal at birth, Judaism also teaches that any denial of truth be avoided. It must be clear: we do not argue on individual religionists, who live and die, but on false ideas. Christian and Muslim infants inculcated into those beliefs are not the issue, but it is religious doctrine that requires a careful analysis and refutation, so as to deflect their harm from all mankind, Jew and Gentile alike. As they possess no proof of Divine origin, these religions are lies, and no good can come from incorporating lies into one's life. As Jews, we must teach Judaism and recognize when we are being taught that which is not Judaism, and condemn it outright, as Maimonides has done above.

Reason teaches that one religion alone can be true: there is only one mankind – there can be only one religion. ■



# the Book of Job

## PART VI PROVIDENCE & JUSTICE

### Chapter 14

Job now commences a new line of reasoning. What do these first three verses mean?

*"Man that is born of a woman is of few days and full of trouble. He comes forth like a flower, and is cut down: he flees also as a shadow, and continues not. And do You open Your eyes upon such an one, and bring me into judgment with Thee?" (14:1-3)*

Job means that since man must sin at youth, how can God judge him for those things? Job mentioned this idea earlier in chapter 13:26 when he said, "For Thou writest bitter things against me, and makest me to possess the iniquities of my youth." Job desires that God judge him as a human being: "punishing me because of the sins of his youth is not right." In verses 4 and 5, Job voices man's physical

limitations ("number of months") and therefore he must be judged as a being with these limitations. Meaning, he cannot be held responsible for actions that are humanly inevitable. These actions were not in his power at the time.

Job rules-out Tzofar's argument on both accounts. First, he explains why he discounts Divine will: looking at the nature of things unveils stark inconsistencies. Secondly, there cannot be 'compensation' because this means that something evil happens, and then receives payment for that evil. Although he is repaid, this would mean that God was lax when the evil occurred. Job concludes that there must be some justice, but he complains that the justice is not so just, if he receives punishment for what he committed in his youth.

In chapter 14, verses 20-22 what is Job's complaint?

*"You prevail forever against him, and he passes: You change his countenance, and send him away. His sons come to honor, and he knows it not; and they are brought low, but he perceives it not of them. But his flesh upon him shall have pain, and his soul within him shall mourn."*

**RABBI ISRAEL CHAIT**

*Transcribed by students*

Here, Job gives the example of a tree that is cut down, but the water replenishes it. He then goes on to state that when man is laid low, he does not rise again. Job is clearly stating the destructions that exist. But there are two kinds: 1) temporary: a tree, and 2) permanent: man.

Maimonides states that God's justice is different than that of man, and man must abide by God's justice. God does not abide by man's justice. There are laws of justice but they are God's laws. And about anything which belongs to God, namely, His system of justice, we cannot ask why it is this way because we would in essence be asking about God's nature. This is just like asking, "Who created God?" We cannot ask this question because His nature is that He exists. The same applies to the question of God's justice: His very nature dictates this form of justice. ■





# The Honesty of God, Torah & the Rabbis

**RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM**

## MAIMONIDES

**Laws of Kings, Laws 11:10-12  
(Capach Edition)**

[10] "...Can there be a greater stumbling block than this (Christianity)? That all the prophets spoke that the Messiah will redeem Israel and save them, and gather their dispersed and strengthen their Mitzvot, and this (one, i.e., Jesus) caused the Jews to be destroyed by the sword, and scattered their remnants and humbled them, and exchanged the Torah, and caused the majority of the world to err to serve a god other than the Lord."

[11] "Nevertheless, the thoughts of the Creator of the world are not within the power of man to reach them, 'for our ways are not His ways, nor are our thoughts His thoughts.' And all these matters of Jesus of Nazareth and that of the Ishmaelite who arose after him are only to straighten the way of the king Messiah and to fix the entire world, to serve God as one, as it is stated (Zephaniah 3:9), 'For then I will turn to the peoples (into) clear speech, to all call in the name of God and serve Him unanimously'."

[12] "How (will this come about)? The entire world has already become filled with the mention of the Messiah, with words of Torah and words of mitzvot and these matters have spread to the furthestmost isles, to many nations of uncircumcised hearts, and they discuss these matters and the mitzvot of the Torah. Some say: 'These mitzvot are true, but were already nullified in the present age and are not applicable for all time.' Others say: 'Hidden matters are in them (mitzvot) and they are not to be taken literally, and the messiah has already come and revealed their hidden (meanings).' And when the true Messiah stands, and he is successful and is raised and exalted, immediately they all will retract and will know that fallacy they inherited from their fathers, and that their prophets and fathers caused them to err."

Maimonides is quite clear:

"Can there be a greater stumbling block than Christianity?"

"Jesus caused the Jews to be destroyed by the sword...and exchanged the Torah, and caused the majority of the world to err to serve a god other than the Lord."

"And when the true Messiah stands, and he is

successful and is raised and exalted, immediately they all will retract and will know that fallacy they inherited from their fathers."

Our greatest Rabbi is not interested in interfaith dialogue, and as we said last week, Rabbis Joseph Soloveitchik and Moshe Feinstein zt"l prohibited such dialogue. This does not express animosity towards any other peoples, since as Jews, these Rabbis recognized God's will that other people exists. These Rabbis fully understood and agreed that God desires every living soul to enjoy truth. But since interfaith dialogue would convey some recognition of a false religion, thereby misleading both Jew and Gentile, this harm must be averted.

As Maimonides teaches, God and the Torah's concern are for truth, and to be honest about the falsehoods of other religions. We are to educate others on these flaws, not seek their approval. When Jews on the whole can raise themselves above the infantile need for approval; when they study our Fundamentals and become convinced by force of reason of the absolute truth of Judaism, no more apologies will be heard for disagreeing with what is false, with other religions. Conversely, our display of Torah study and our teachings will expose the other nations to truth, for which they will state, "fallacy they inherited from their fathers" and "truly this is a wise and discerning nation."

If you are Jewish, study our Fundamentals (reprinted in this issue) so you might accurately represent Judaism for yourself, your family and children, and for other peoples. If you are a Gentile, find an orthodox Jew or Rabbi who will stand up for Torah Fundamentals, and teach you the truth, and the flaws with other religions as Maimonides taught.

The Torah is for everyone; as Jews, we are simply its guardians and teachers. ■



## Letters



## Letters

*from our*

## READERS



## Letters

Mesora invites your questions, letters in response to articles, your own thoughts, or your suggestions for the JewishTimes.

*"The only poor question is the one not asked."*

Email us:

[letters@mesora.org](mailto:letters@mesora.org)

## Misrepresenting God's Will

**Reader:** With all due respect to Rabbi Yitz Greenburg, his position on God's validation of various religions for various peoples is preposterous and leaves contradictions, which cannot be resolved logically. First, perhaps a brief primer on basic history would be instructive. Torah was first given to mankind as a whole, serving as the single, Objective Truth and guide to perfection for God's only intelligent creation. Gentiles, Buddhists, Muslims were not part of the equation, as they did not exist. There was man and there were the rest of the species. The objective truth of Torah can never change as logic would dictate, and as the Rambam elucidates in his "13 Principles".

Once man had demonstrated that he would follow his animalistic drives over any attempts toward a semblance of any "good", the world was destroyed, save Noah, his immediate family and the animal species aboard the ark. Man then received the 7 Noahide Laws, which he again demonstrated he could not follow. Those laws are still incumbent today and rightly serve as a basis to maintain a level of compassion and order, without which, chaos would and does in places, ensue. Taryag mitzvos and the exegeses of the Oral Law were eventually given only to the nation of Israel, as they were the only ones who demonstrated a willingness and appreciation for such responsibility.

Jews are to serve as a "light unto the nations". Would such responsibility be truly necessary or incumbent upon us if God had intended a double standard for Jews and for the rest of the nations? Rabbi Greenburg seems to believe that God's original intention of one objective truth for all of mankind, His creation, was somehow flawed and that God "changed his mind" and inspired various peoples of various nations toward subjective reinterpretations of what is best for man! I would assume that the rabbi is familiar with Rambam's 9th Principle stating that the Torah will never be amended nor replaced with an alternative as many of us say in our Shacharis prayers.

I do not see any usefulness in his assertions. When did God create parallel universes or beings where the Truth is subjective within the parameters of each one? When did God change his position on idolatry, for example, and allow it for some of the myriad man made religions? Does the rabbi wish that Jews shirk our worldly responsibilities, disengaging from the rest of the world and cruelly deprive gentiles of our positive influence?

What's next...validation of the diluted relativistic moralities of the Conservative and Reform?

Nissim ■

## Fulfilling God's Will

**Reader:** I think we still have so much to discover about God's design of the world, but I don't think thoughts can influence another person's life. If so much power to thoughts existed, we would not live a real life. I believe that thoughts can influence our "own" life but mainly because thoughts come before actions, and if we have good thoughts we will probably be more predisposed to do good actions.

If for example, my thoughts had an immediate influence in the lives of others, people who are loved will be very lucky and people who are hated would be very unlucky; but we don't see these things happening in a regular basis. Anyway, I don't think God wants someone else making things go well for us. God wants everybody to be responsible for his own life.

Giving power to thoughts can lead to idolatry. This is what I believe.

I would like to be free to make my own reasoning but I am afraid to err. You wrote in the JewishTimes two weeks ago, "man cannot initiate a relationship with God, unless God makes this relationship a reality, and does so first." I want to know if it is OK according Judaism to talk to God freely as I do constantly, as if He were a loving father. Is it right.

**Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim:** Words or thoughts cannot effect change except in the person, as you correctly stated. You most certainly should talk and pray to God.

I must thank you, since your question has exposed a flaw in my words, which I must respond to here. I feel my statement requires correction. When I wrote the article "Menora: a Lesson in Subordination" (March 3rd JewishTimes) that God must initiate the relationship between Him and us, I meant in a general sense: that He allows mankind to relate to Him. I cited the cases where Menora was used to teach man that God allowed the rebuilding of the Second Temple, and the resuming of Temple worship during Channukah. I explained that God made His activities (miracle of Chanuka and the Menora vision) the initiation of man's Temple worship, to teach that without His design of how we are to worship Him, we will err. We require education of what God is, but more specifically here, "how" to approach Him, without tripping into idolatry. God's miracles of the oil during Channukah taught us that He was essential to our resuming of Temple worship. In what sense is he essential? In the sense that man must not think that e can automatically "relate" to God. God must first instruct us regarding what we can know about

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## Letters

Him, and what are the actions that will lead us towards the true Creator, not some fantasy, as seen in all other religions. It is for this reason that our daily prayers commence with the "Baruch She-Amar" prayer, "Blessed is the One who spoke, and the world came to be." We must first isolate the true concept of God: the Creator of the universe.

Man cannot suddenly relate to God with his imagined methods, as he does with the physical world. For man's relationships are physical, whereas God is not. How then can man relate to He, of whom he knows nothing about? However, this is in a general sense, since we do find those like Abraham who on his own, and with no instruction, developed a true relationship with the Creator, so much so, that God spoke with him and guided his life. For the masses, we require God's instruction for the true relationship with Him. But few people have been able to align themselves with truth to such a degree, that they brought themselves under God's providence.

But for anyone to relate to God, one must first obtain the correct notion of God, to truly be talking to "Him". What is your idea of God?

**Reader:** Even if I thought until now that my idea of God came from my original religious teachings, now, that I am trying to write it down, I am realizing that it's not quite like that.

My idea of God is very personal; I have been talking to God all my life. I usually start my talking to Him by saying: "You know everything of me, you know me, I beg your pardon because I am so far away from perfection, I want you to be proud of me and I feel so unsatisfied but I will try to do better". I continuously talk to Him during the day by saying, "thank God" whenever something good happens to me. Usually when something bad happens to me I ask pardon for all my sins, "I promise I will be a better person" (I make usually a specific promise) and then I ask God for help.

All the people that taught me how to pray, told me to pray to Jesus or to the Virgin Mary, but I would just pray to God; it came natural to me. I would never pray to Jesus; it seemed to me odd, I've always considered him a human being. I have never prayed to saints or nothing else besides God.

I think God is omnipresent, omniscient and omnipotent. I know that what may be right for me may not be right for Him because He knows all the parameters, and I am captive of my emotions. I trust Him, but I beg Him to make me understand why some time some things happen. I don't give Him explanations about my behavior because I know; He already knows what is in my heart. I just talk to Him because it is important to me to know He is there and that things have a sense, an order. When I talk to Him I become more acute and I am very honest to myself because I know He knows all.

Please can you tell me if God is aware of

everything that is happening to each of us? Is He hearing us? Is my idea of God very different from that of Judaism?

I am not afraid of Him because I am convince He wishes me well but yet I know He can not interfere because there is a design and there are God's laws.

I know He exists but I want to know Him, I want to know what He wants from me and How can I be sure He is pleased with me and my actions, I want to know the details, I want to know if He wants me to do much better. I was taught very general things, and in this complex world, I am very confused.

I feel in this moment that without God there is no sense to life, but I need to get close to God in a rational way. I don't want to feel alone anymore.

Thanks for your time.

**Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim:** You are correct that God is omnipresent, omniscient and omnipotent, and that one must not pray to anything except for God. This is because He created everything, which teaches us that He is omnipotent. Praying to anything else, means praying to that which is not omnipotent, since there can be only one Omnipotent Being. You already stated that you admit of God's omniscience, so I don't understand your question, whether he knows everything. But yes, He knows all.

We must know that God is not physical in any way, He has no matter, size, parts, or form, as Moses told the Jews regarding God's Revelation at Sinai, (Deut. 4:12) "And God spoke to you from inside the fire, a voice of words did you hear, and no form did you see, only a voice." Studying the Torah, we will learn from the Rabbis' explanation, what we can and cannot know in connection with God. We will also learn what is a proper act, and what is prohibited. We must view the Torah as an indispensable tool for our perfection, which you admirably pursue.

Whether we are Jewish or Gentile, there is only one God given system, and by following it, we will learn what God desires of us. The Talmud equates one with no Torah, to a sick being, and the Torah as the cure.

Find yourself a Rabbi locally, and if none are close by, move to a town where you can "become soiled in the dust of his feet [servicing him] and drink with thirst his words" as Rabbi Yosi teaches (Ethics 1:4), for through his Torah you will learn God's will, and a true life. Observe the 7 Noachide Laws at a minimum, but take on what ever more laws you desire, for they will perfect you further. Through Torah study with an orthodox Rabbi, and through reading their writings, you will learn what God desires for mankind.

Feel free to email any further questions, as I am sure many others are thinking, what you are writing. For this reason, I include your words here so together, we learn, and together, we may teach others. Thank you. ■



## Changing God's Will?

**Reader:** Recently I was discussing Parshas Ki Tisa with a group of friends. Some questions came up concerning the passage where Moshe prays that the people not be destroyed because of the Golden Calf. We are not Jews and have limited knowledge of the Torah and the Hebrew language, so hopefully you can help shed some light on this passage. It raises some questions regarding the nature of God and man's relationship to Him.

One translation reads, "And God repented of the evil which He said He would do unto His people." This makes it sound like God did something wrong (or was about to) and needed to repent. But surely that

idea cannot be correct. Another translation reads, "God reconsidered regarding the evil that He declared He would do to His people." Why would He need to reconsider? Surely God already had knowledge of all the things that Moshe mentioned. Since Moshe was not presenting God with any information that He was not already aware of, then what need would there be for Him to reconsider? Is it possible for God to change His mind?

As I understand it, when a man prays, God does not change, but the man changes. If this is so, then what change occurred in Moshe to result in his prayer being successful? And how was Moshe able to pray on behalf

of the Jews; wouldn't they need to pray themselves? I hope I'm not asking too many questions (is that possible?) but generally I would like to know what is going on in this passage and what we can learn from it. Thank you,

— Joshua Plank

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## Fundamentals

**Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim:** You are correct. God knows all, and Moses could not make any change in God. God said, "I am God, I do not change" (Malachi, 3:6) Nor is God like man that he should repent, "Not a man is God that He will lie, nor the son of man that He should repent; Shall He say, and do not? And shall He speak and not fulfill". (Numbers, 23:19) So if God is unchangeable, how does Moses effectuate repentance for the Jews, certainly, when they did nothing?!

The answer comes from another quote: "And now leave Me, and My anger will kindle in them (the Jews) and I will destroy them, and make from you a great nation." Rashi, a brilliant commentator says this: "Until now, Moses did not know that he might pray on behalf of the Jews, but now that God said 'Leave Me', Moses understood that the matter depended on him: that if he prayed, God would not destroy."

Rashi teaches us that the matter was as follows: the Jews sinned to the point of deserving destruction...provided no other mitigating factor was present. This was the situation at and, from which, God did not "change His mind" with His forgiveness. The situation had a "status", and this status is what deserved annihilation of the Jews. But if this status changed, then the Jews would no longer require annihilation. What changed? Moses did, as he prayed, and through his prayer, he reached some new level unlike he was prior, where he could now remedy the Jews' sin. Even though the Jews did not repent, Moses made a change in himself, which removed the need for annihilation of the Jews. Therefore, the Jews were spared, and not due to any change of heart of God, but because of Moses' increase in his level of perfection and in his knowledge, something that from the start would remedy the situation. That is exactly what God said, "leave Me, and I will destroy the Jews." Meaning, if you don't leave Me, but remain and pray, you can effectuate a change that would remove the need for the Jews' destruction.

Joshua, we learn from your question that we must continuously study all of the Torah, Prophets and Writings. For many issues' various facets are addressed throughout in numerous locations: questions raised by one text are answered by another. We also learn that with the Written Torah alone, and with no Oral Law or Rabbinic commentary (Rashi) we will flounder with no answers. God gave mankind the Written Torah and the Oral Torah, since both are indispensable for our accurate understanding of truths.

Other religions, even those who hijack the Torah, are at a loss as to God's will, since they have no Oral Law, and no lineage of Rabbis teaching them this Oral Law. This is yet another argument which conclusively refutes all religions, other than Judaism. ■



# MAIMONIDES'

## 13 PRINCIPLES

Translated by Marc Mermelstein

*Due to the vital importance of these principles, as you will read in Maimonides' closing remark, I wish to make them available for all to read. I thank Marc Mermelstein for his efforts in this translation. These 13 Principles compiled by Maimonides outline Judaism's tenets, which one must acknowledge as truths in order to be considered a Jew, and to partake in the World to Come. (To read the original Hebrew, see the end of Talmud Sanhedrin, Maimonides' commentary on the Mishna.)*

### Principle I. To know the existence of the Creator

To believe in the existence of the Creator, and this Creator is perfect in all manner of existence. He is the cause of all existence. He causes them to exist and they exist only because of Him. And if you could contemplate a case, such that He was not to exist...then all things would cease to exist and there would remain nothing. And if you were to contemplate a case, such that all things would cease to exist aside from the Creator, His existence would not cease. And He would lose nothing; and oneness and kingship is His alone. Hashem of strength is His name because He is sufficient with His own existence, and sufficient [is] just Him alone, and needs no other. And the existences of the angels, and the celestial bodies, and all that is in them and that which is below them...all need Him for their existence. And this is the first pillar and is attested to by the verse, "I am Hashem your God."

### Principle II. The unity of God

Meaning to say to accept that this is the quintessential idea of Oneness. It is not like the oneness of a pair (i.e. pair of shoes - one group) and not one like a species. And not like man that has many individual (members) nor like a body that divides into many different parts until no end (every part being divisible). Rather, God is one and there is no other oneness like His. This is the second principle and is taught in what it says, "Hear Israel, Hashem is Our God, Hashem is one."

### Principle III. The denial of physicality in connection with God

This is to accept that this Oneness that we have mentioned above (Principle II) is not a body and has no strength in the body, and has no shape or image or relationship to a body or parts thereof. This is why the Sages of blessed memory said with regards to heaven there is no sitting, nor standing, no awakens, nor tiredness. This is all to say that He does not partake of any physical actions or qualities. And if He were to be a body then He would be like any other body and would not be God. And all that is written in the holy books regarding descriptions of God, they are all anthropomorphic. Thus said our great Rabbis of blessed memory, "The Torah speaketh in man's language" (i.e. using human terms to offer some understanding). And the Rabbis have already spoken at length on this issue. This is the third pillar and is attested to by the verse, "For you saw no image" meaning that you did not see an image or any form when you stood at Sinai because as we have just said, He has no body, nor power of the body.

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**Principle IV. God's Antiquity**

This is that God existed prior to everything, and exists after everything. This is proved many times throughout scripture and is attested to by the verse, "Meuna Elokei kedem."

**Principle V. That God, blessed be He is worthy that we serve Him, to glorify Him, to make known His greatness, and to do His commands**

But not to do this to those that are below Him in the creation. Not to the angels or to the stars or the planets or anything else, for they are all created things in nature and in their functioning, there is no choice or judgment except by God Himself. Also it is not fitting to serve them as intermediaries to God. Only to God should you incline your thoughts and your actions. This is the fifth principle and it warns against idolatry and most of the Torah speaks out against this.

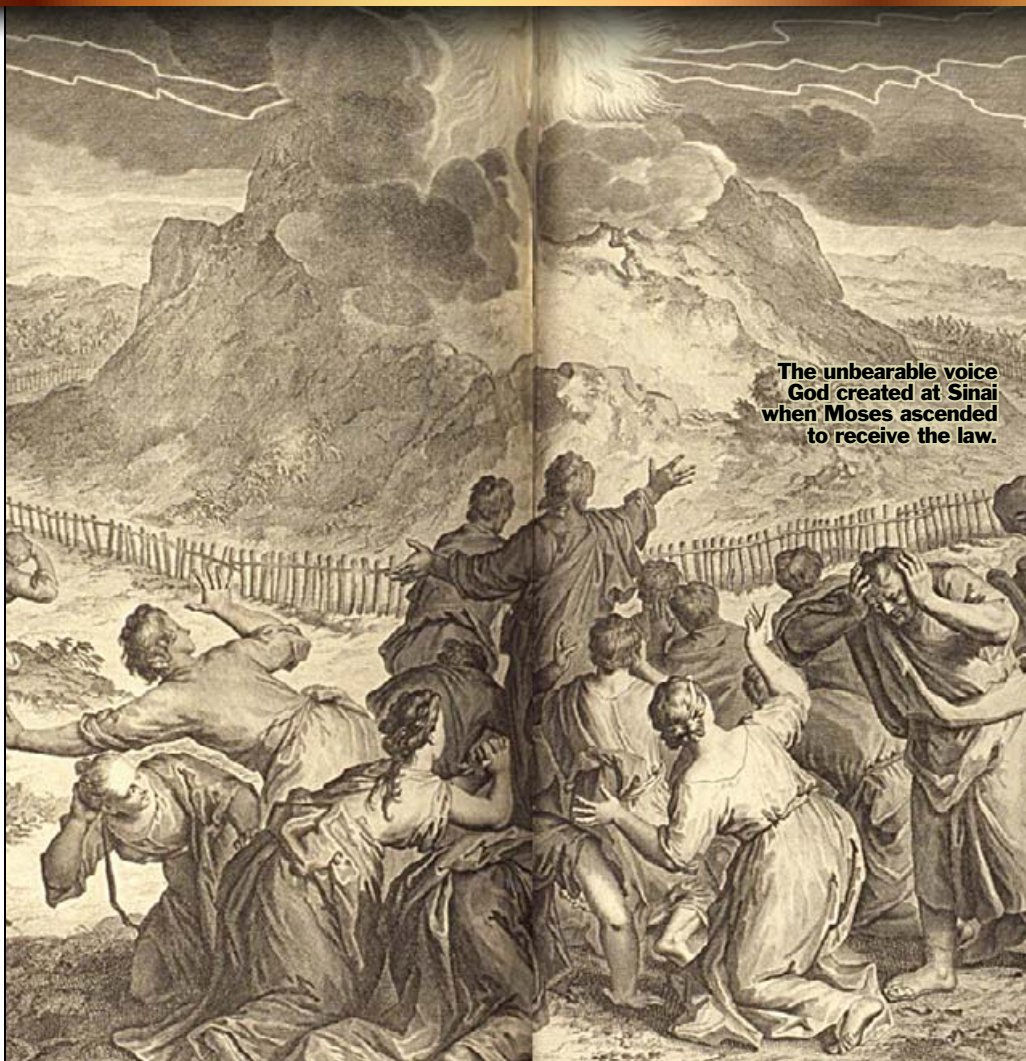
**Principle VI. Prophecy**

And this is that it is known to man that this (prophet) is a type of man who are created beings of great stature and perfection of the character traits. Who have tremendous knowledge until a different intelligence attaches to them when the intelligence of the person clings to the intelligence of God and it rests upon him. And these are the prophets; and this is prophecy; and the idea of it. The explanation of it is very long and the intention is not to bring a sign for every fundamental and to explain it all, encompassing of all knowledge (i.e. God's knowledge) but it is mentioned to us in a story form and all of the Torah attests to this.

**Principle VII. The prophetic capacity of Moses our Teacher, peace be upon him**

And this is that we accept that he was the father of all prophets that were before him and that will be after him. He was on a qualitatively different level than any other, and he is chosen from all other people before and after him of any that have any knowledge of God; for his was the greatest. And he, peace be upon him, rose to the levels of the angels. He was granted all areas of knowledge and prophecy and his physical attributes did not diminish. His knowledge was different and it is through this difference that it is ascribed to him that he spoke to God without any intermediary or angel.

My intention was to explain this puzzling concept and to open up the sealed areas in the Torah regarding the verses of "face to face"



The unbearable voice  
God created at Sinai  
when Moses ascended  
to receive the law.

and other similar references, but its length would be tremendous and it would require numerous proofs from the Torah and other sources and encompass many areas. Even to write it the briefest of briefest it would require 100 pages, so I will save it and write it in another book. I will now return to the intent of this seventh fundamental that the prophecy of Moses our teacher, peace be upon him, was different from all others in 4 ways:

1) Regarding all other prophets, God spoke to them through intermediaries. Regarding Moses, it was without one, as it says, "face to face I spoke to him".

2) Regarding all other prophets, prophecy came to them at night while they were asleep in a dream as it says, "in a dream of the night" and other such references; or in the day but only after a deep sleep-like state came over them, and all their senses were shut off except their thoughts. Not so by Moses. Moses would receive a prophecy any time when he would stand between the two figures [fixed] on the ark, as God attests to it, "and I will make it

known to you there" and "not so my servant Moses. Face to face I speak to him."

3) When a prophet would receive prophecy he would not be able to stand the intense effect and he would shake and not be able to stand, as it relates regarding Daniel in his encounter with the angel Gabriel. Regarding Moses, he did not suffer from this. As it says, "Face to face do I speak to him as a person speaks to his friend". And even though this is the greatest connection to God, still, he did not suffer.

4) All other prophets could not receive prophecy at their will, [but] only when God desired to tell them. Some would go days or months without prophecy. Even if they wanted or needed something, sometimes it would be days or months or years or even never that they would be told [a prophecy]. Some would have people play music to put them in a good mood such as Elisha. But Moses, peace be upon him, received prophecy whenever he wanted, as it says, "Stand here and listen to what God will tell you what to do" and "God said to Moses tell Aaron your brother that he

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can't come to the holy of holies at any time [he wants]". Our rabbis said, "Aaron was prohibited to come whenever he wanted, but not Moses.

### **Principle VIII. That the Torah is from heaven [God]**

And this is that you believe that all of this Torah that was given by Moses our teacher, peace be upon him, that it is all from the mouth of God. Meaning that it was received by him entirely from God. And it is not known how Moses received it except by Moses himself, peace be upon him, that it came to him. That he was like a stenographer that you read to him and he writes all that is told to him: all the events and dates, the stories, and all the commandments. There is no difference between "And the sons of Cham were Kush, and Mizraim, and his wife was Mehatbe'el" and "Timnah was his concubine" and "I am Hashem your God" and "Hear Israel [Hashem your God, Hashem is one]" for it was all given by God. And it is all Hashem's perfect Torah; pure, holy, and true. And he who says that these verses or stories, Moses made them up, he is a denier of our sages and prophets worse than all other types of deniers [form of heretic] for he thinks that what is in the Torah is from man's flawed heart and the questions and statements and the dates and stories are of no value for they are from Moses Rabbeinu, peace be upon him. And this area is that he believes the Torah is not from heaven. And on this our sages of blessed memory said, "he who believes that the Torah is from heaven except this verse that God did not say it but rather Moses himself did [he is a denier of all the Torah]." And this that God spoke this and that, each and every statement in the Torah, is from God and it is full of wisdom (each statement) and benefit to those who understand them. And its depth of knowledge is greater than all of the land and wider than all the seas and a person can only go in the path of David, the anointed of the God of Jacob who prayed and said "Open my eyes so that I may glance upon the wonders of Your Torah" (Psalms 119). And similarly the explanation of the Torah was also received from God and this is what we use today to know the appearance and structure of the sukka and the lulav and the shofar, tzitzis, tefillin and their usage. And all this God said to Moses and Moses told to us. And he is trustworthy in his role as the messenger and the verse that teaches of this fundamental is what is written (Numbers 16) "And Moses said, with this shall you know that Hashem sent me to do all these actions

(wonders) for they are not from my heart."

### **Principle IX. The completeness of the Torah**

And this is that the Torah is from God and is not lacking. That to it you can't add or take away from. Not from the written Torah or from the oral Torah, as it says, "Do not add to it and do not take away from it." (Deut 3). And we already explained what needs to be explained about this fundamental at the beginning of this essay.

### **Principle X. That God knows man's actions and does not remove His eye from them**

His knowledge is not like someone who says God abandoned the land but rather like it says (Jer. 32) "Great in council and mighty in deed, Your eyes are cognizant to all the ways of mankind." "And God saw for the evil of man on the land had grown greatly." (Gen. 6) And it says, "The disgust of Sodom and Amorrah is great" and this demonstrates the 10th principle.

### **Principle XI. That God gives reward to he who does the commandments of the Torah and punishes those that transgress its admonishments and warnings**

And the great reward is the life of the world to come and the punishment is the cutting off of the soul [in the world to come]. And we already said regarding this topic what these are. And the verse that attests to this principle is (Exodus 32) "And now if You would but forgive their sins - and if not erase me from this book that You have written." And God answered him, "He who sinned against Me I will erase from My book." This is a proof that God knows the sinner and the fulfiller in order to mete out reward to one and punishment to the other.

### **Principle XII. The era of the Messiah**

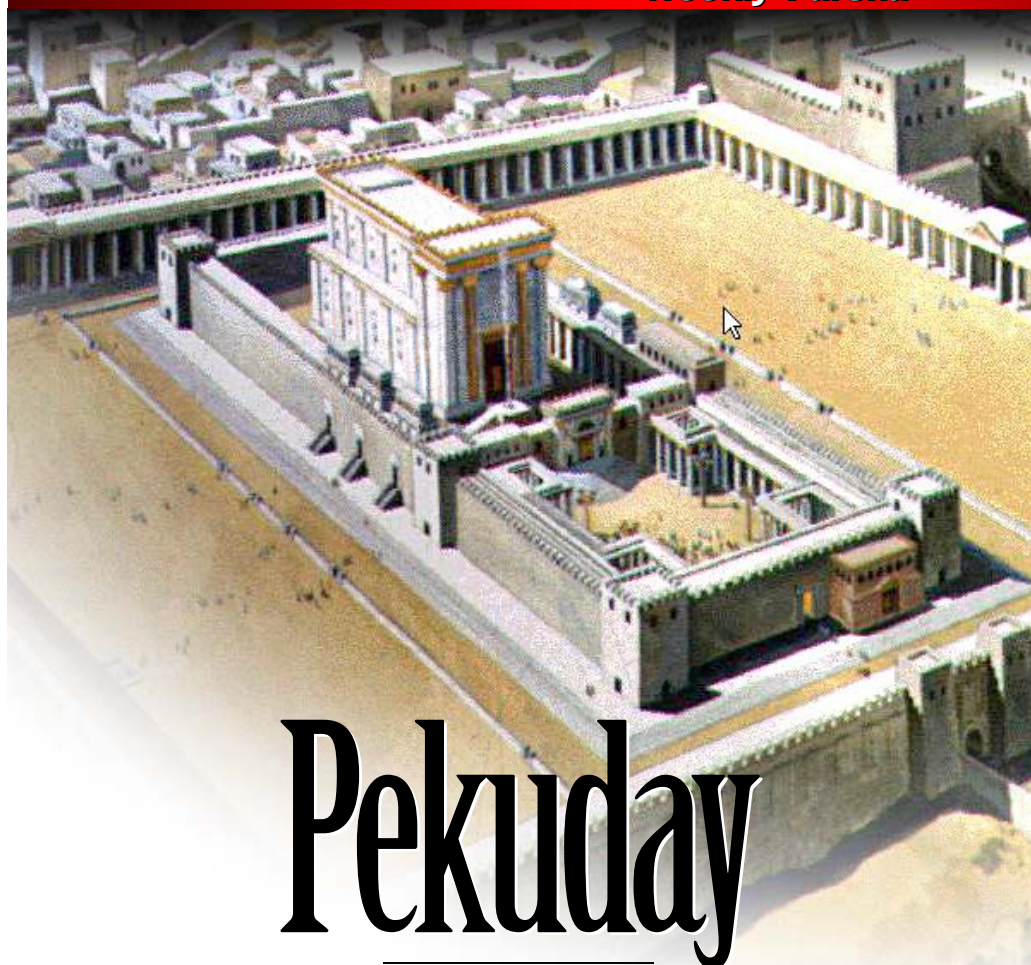
And this is to believe that in truth that he will come and that you should be waiting for him even though he delays in coming. And you should not calculate times for him to come, or to look in the verses of Tanach to see when he should come. The sages say: The wisdom of those who calculate times [of his coming] is small and that you should believe that he will be greater and more honored than all of the kings of Israel since the beginning of time as it is prophesied by all the prophets from Moses our teacher, peace be upon him, until Malachi, peace be upon him. And he who doubts or diminishes the greatness of the Messiah is a

denier in all the Torah for it testifies to the Messiah explicitly in the portion of Bilam and the portion of "You are gathered (towards the end of Deut)". And part of this principle that there is no king of Israel except from the house of David and from the seed of Solomon alone. And anyone who disputes this regarding this family is a denier of the name of God and in all the words of the prophets.

### **Principle XIII. Resurrection of the dead**

And we have already explained it And when the person will believe all these fundamentals and his faith will be clear in them he enters into the nation of Israel and it is a mitzva to love him and to have mercy on him and to act to him according to all the ways in which God commanded us regarding loving your neighbor. And even if he did all of the sins in the Torah due to desire of the emotions, and from his physical aspect's conquering him, he will be punished for his sins, but he still has a share in the world to come and is among the sinners of Israel. However if he rejects one of these fundamentals he leaves the nation and is a denier of the fundamentals and is called a heretic, a denier, etc., and it is a mitzva to hate him and to destroy him (financially - not physically to kill him. And not to steal either). And regarding him it is said (Psalms 139) "Behold will not the enemy of God be my enemy?"

I have expounded at length many things and I have left the topic of my composition but I have done it for I saw a need in the dealings of the fundamentals of faith and I have gathered together many different and spread out areas Therefore know them and succeed in understanding them and review them many times and know them very well [i.e. not just memorization but to understand fully and to be able to support them and know their proofs]. Therefore if after one or ten times you think you have understood them, God knows that you are just involved in falsehood. Therefore do not read them quickly because I have not written them as it suddenly entered into my mind. But rather, after a deep and careful study of the whole area and after I have seen many clear and true ideas and I have seen what is proper to believe of them [as the fundamentals] and I have brought proofs and logical demonstrations for each and every one of them. May it be God's will that I have been correct that He helped me through this area on the good path and now I will return to my explanation of this chapter [in the Talmud]. ■



# Pekuday

RABBI BERNARD FOX

“And these are the accounts of the Mishkan -- the Tabernacle of the Testimony -- that were calculated by Moshe. It was the service of the Leveyim under the authority of Itamar the son of Ahron the Kohen.” (Shemot 38:21)

Parshat Pekuay completes the Torah’s discussion of the construction of the Mishkan – the Tabernacle. The Mishkan was the central element of the camp of Bnai Yisrael during their travels in the wilderness. Once Bnai Yisrael entered the land of Israel, conquered, and settled the land, the Mishkan was replaced by the Bait HaMikdash – the Temple. King Shlomo built the first Bait HaMikdash. Shlomo’s Bait HaMikdash was destroyed. Ezra initiated the construction of the second Bait HaMikdash. This Temple was also destroyed. Today, we do not have a Bait HaMikdash but we look forward to its rebuilding.

Although we do not presently have a Bait HaMikdash, the Talmud refers to the synagogues and study-halls that we construct in the places of our exile as minor versions of the Bait HaMikdash.[1] In what sense are these synagogues and study-halls minor

versions of the Bait HaMikdash? In other words, what are the practical implications of the status?

The Talmud’s observation is followed by an admonishment to not use the synagogue as a shortcut. This means that a person may not pass through a synagogue in order shorten his route to a destination. It seems from the Talmud’s juxtaposition of these two discussions that the status of the synagogue as a minor Mikdash engenders an obligation to treat a synagogue with respect.

Maimonides seems to take the comparison of the synagogue to the Bait HaMikdash one step further. In his Sefer HaMitzvot, Maimonides explains that one of the negative commands of the Torah prohibits the destruction of the Bait HaMikdash, erasure of the name of Hashem or the destruction of any of the prophetic works.[2] Maimonides also provides a list of the 613 mitzvot in the introduction to his Mishne Torah. In that version of the 613 mitzvot, he explains that the prohibition against destroying the Bait HaMikdash includes an injunction against destroying a synagogue or study-hall. It seems that accord-

ing to Maimonides, we are not only required to treat the synagogue with respect but that destroying a synagogue or study-hall is a Torah level violation of the prohibition against destroying the Bait HaMikdash or erasing Hashem’s name.

In short, it seems that the Talmud’s description of the synagogue and study-hall as minor version of the Mikdash is not merely a homily. This comparison actually expresses itself in specific laws regarding the manner in which we must treat these institutions.

However, if we investigate Maimonides’ position more carefully a problem becomes evident. As we have explained, Maimonides seems to treat very literally the Talmud’s assertion that a synagogue and study-hall have the status of a minor Mikdash. This implies that – in some sense – the synagogue and study-hall partake of the sanctity of the Bait HaMikdash.

Maimonides explains in his Mishne Torah and his Sefer HaMitzvot that the Bait HaMikdash is a place designated for the offering of sacrifices.[3] Furthermore, Maimonides explains that the Bait HaMikdash is composed of specific elements including the altars, Menorah, and Shulchan. The synagogue and study-hall do not meet either of these requirements. We cannot offer sacrifices in the synagogue or study-hall. Neither do these institutions have the components essential to the Bait HaMikdash. So, in what sense do the synagogue and study-hall partake of the sanctity of the Bait HaMikdash?

The obvious response to this question is to recognize that in our time prayer takes the place of the sacrifices offered in the Bait HaMikdash.[4] However, it is unlikely that Maimonides’ comparison the synagogue and study-hall to the Bait HaMikdash is based on this factor.

Maimonides explains that there is a positive mitzvah in the Torah to build a Bait HaMikdash. He discusses this commandment as length in his Sefer HaMitzvot and Mishne Torah. Nowhere in this discussion does he remotely indicate that this commandment includes building a synagogue or study-hall. However, in his discussion of the mitzvah of prayer he does acknowledge that we are obligated to build synagogues. He explains that any community composed of ten Jews is required to designate a structure to serve a synagogue. The structure must be available at all times for prayer. He adds that the members of the community may force one another to participate in the building of this synagogue.[5] Maimonides’ placement of this obligation in his discussion of the laws of

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prayer, indicates that the obligation is somehow connected to the positive command to pray daily. The specific connection is apparent from two other requirements that Maimonides outlines. First, he explains that it is appropriate for a person to designate a regular place in which to pray. Each time the person prays he should do so from this designated place.[6] Second, explains that praying with a congregation is preferable to praying alone.[7] The synagogue is a place designated for the prayer of the community. It fulfills both of these requirements. This seems to be the basis for the obligation to build a synagogue.

It emerges from this discussion that the synagogue and the Bait HaMikdash are fundamentally different institutions. The Bait HaMikdash is a structure with a specific description that is designed and designated for the offering of sacrifices. The synagogue is an institution that is required in order for the mitzvah of prayer to be properly fulfilled. On a deeper level, the distinction between these two institutions is even more fundamental. The Bait HaMikdash is innately the subject and substance of a mitzvah – it is a cheftza shel mitzvah. The synagogue is not innately the subject or substance of a mitzvah. It is needed in order to perform the mitzvah of prayer properly. Apparently, this is the reason that Maimonides includes the requirement to build a synagogue in his discussion of the mitzvah of prayer and not in his discussion of the Bait HaMikdash. So, in what sense are the synagogue and study-hall a minor Mikdash?

It seems that according to Maimonides the synagogue and study-hall derive their sanctity from two different but related sources. He hints to one these sources in the end of his discussion regarding the synagogue. He comments that a public square that is used on occasion for community prayer is not endowed with sanctity. He explains that although this public square is used for prayer this is not its sole designation. Instead, it is generally used for secular purposes and is only used for prayer on occasion.[8] The implication of this explanation is that the synagogue and study-hall are endowed with sanctity because of their exclusive designations as places for prayer and Torah study. Maimonides further explains that in this sense there is a valid comparison that can be made between the synagogue and study-hall and the Bait HaMikdash. The Bait HaMikdash retains its sanctity even after its destruction. The place in which the Bait HaMikdash stood is sacred even today. He explains that the same rule applies to a synagogue and study-hall. Even if they are

destroyed, the place on which they stood retains its sanctity.[9] In other words, according to Maimonides, there is a valid comparison between the synagogue and study-hall and the Bait HaMikdash. All retain their sanctity even when destroyed. This common characteristic apparently is a result of the similar designation of these institutions. All are structures designated exclusively for the service of Hashem. This designation results in a residual sanctity even after the structures have been destroyed. In other words, as explained above, the sanctity of the Bait HaMikdash is innate, whereas the sanctity of the synagogue and study-hall is derived from the activities that are performed within their structures. Nonetheless, they share the common characteristic of being structures designated for the service of Hashem. As a result of this common characteristic, they retain their sanctity even when destroyed.

According to Maimonides, the sanctity of the synagogue and study-hall is also derived from a second source. As explained above, Maimonides maintains that the prohibition against destroying the Bait HaMikdash or erasing Hashem's name includes a prohibition against the destruction of a synagogue or study-hall. On what basis is the destruction of a synagogue or study-hall included in this prohibition.

It is interesting that Maimonides does not discuss this prohibition in his treatment of the laws regarding the Bait HaMikdash. Instead, it is placed in the opening chapters of his Mishne Torah. In these opening chapters, Maimonides describes the foundations of the Torah. There are two characteristics of Maimonides' discussion of this prohibition that are directly relevant to our question. First, Maimonides begins the discussion by explaining that it is prohibited to erase Hashem's name. Only after outlining the laws related to this element of the prohibition does he mention that the prohibition includes destroying the Bait HaMikdash.[10] Second, Maimonides discusses this prohibition directly after of our obligation to sanctify Hashem's name through our actions and behaviors and the prohibition against desecrating His name through our actions and behaviors.[11]

It seems that the prohibition against destroying the Bait HaMikdash or erasing Hashem's name is an extension of the prohibition against desecrating His name. Furthermore, although the mitzvah includes both destroying the Bait HaMikdash and erasing Hashem's name Maimonides seems to regard the erasure of Hashem's name as the primary element of the

prohibition. The destruction of the Bait HaMikdash is included in the prohibition because this action is an expression of the same underlying theme. What is this unifying theme?

Apparently, according to Maimonides, the destruction of the Bait HaMikdash is comparable to the erasure of Hashem's name because the Bait HaMikdash is intimately associated with Hashem. As we have explained, it is a place designated for His worship. Therefore, one who destroys the Bait HaMikdash has desecrated Hashem's name in a manner that similar and on par with erasing His name.

We can now identify the reasoning that compelled Maimonides to include within this mitzvah a prohibition against destroying a synagogue or study-hall. As we have explained, these institutions are also designated for the service of Hashem. In this sense, they share a fundamental characteristic of the Bait HaMikdash. Therefore, the mitzvah prohibiting the erasure of Hashem's name includes the prohibition against destroying the Bait HaMikdash and destroying a synagogue or study-hall. ■

[1] Mesechet Meggilah 29a.

[2] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Sefer HaMitzvot, Mitzvat Lo Ta'aseh 65.

[3] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Mishne Torah, Hilchot Bait HaBechirah 1:1, Sefer HaMitzvot, Mitzvat Aseh 20.

[4] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Mishne Torah, Hilchot Tefillah 1:5-6.

[5] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Mishne Torah, Hilchot Tefillah 11:1.

[6] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Mishne Torah, Hilchot Tefillah 5:6.

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

[8] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Mishne Torah, Hilchot Tefillah 11:21.

[9] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Mishne Torah, Hilchot Tefillah 11:11.

[10] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Mishne Torah, Hilchot Yesodai HaTorah 6:1-7.

[11] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Mishne Torah, Hilchot Yesodai

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