

Together, the Egyptian Passover observed when we were not yet freed, and all future Passovers teach this holiday's primary lesson. What is it?
Answered in "Pesach, Matza & Maror"



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Passover

Pesach

RABBI BERNARD FOX

“It is a positive command to tell of the miracles and wonders that were done for our fathers in Egypt on the night of the fifteenth of Nisan, as it says: “Remember this day that you went out from Egypt” just as it says: “Remember the day of the Shabbat.” (Mishne Torah, Hilchot Chametz U’Matzah 7:1)

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PESACH MATZA & MAROR

*an interesting
interrelation...*

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

The Seder

The Seder is the central focus of Passover. During the Seder, there are a number of primary laws. We read the following in the Talmud (Pesachim 117a) and in the Haggadah: “Rabbi Gamliel taught, ‘Anyone who does not explain three matters on Passover, does not fulfill his obligation; 1) the Paschal lamb, 2) matza and 3) the bitter herbs’.” We wonder why these three elements are so central to Passover. How do these define the nature of the holiday? Another interesting feature is that there were two Passovers: an Egyptian Passover,

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Passover

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One of the most fundamental commandments that we perform on Pesach is tzipur yetziat mitzrayim – the recounting of our redemption from Egypt. The mitzvah of tzipur seems rather easy to understand. Pesach is the first of the three annual festivals. It is followed by Shavuot which recalls the revelation at Sinai and by Succot that recalls our sojourn in the wilderness. It seems reasonable that on Pesach when we renew this annual cycle of festivals we should discuss the redemption from Egypt. This discussion provides us with an understanding and appreciation of Pesach and also provides us with the fundamental knowledge needed to understand and appreciate the festivals that will follow Pesach in this annual cycle.

The Torah also presents us with a rather clear description of the manner in which the mitzvah of tzipur is to be performed. The Torah tells us that we are to retell the events to our children.[1] In other words, we are required to provide our children with an oral account of the events of our redemption.

However, Maimonides' explanation of the mitzvah of tzipur does present some troubling difficulties. Maimonides begins his explanation of the mitzvah of tzipur by indicating the source in the Torah for the mitzvah. He explains that the mitzvah is derived from a passage in Sefer Shemot. The passage tells us to recall the day that we left the bondage of Egypt.[2] Maimonides then compares this passage to the passage that commands us to recall the Shabbat. This passage is also in Sefer Shemot.[3] It is part of the Decalogue. Maimonides understands this passage to be the source for the mitzvah to recite Kiddush at the advent of Shabbat.[4] In other words, Maimonides is telling us that the mitzvah of tzipur is similar or comparable to the requirement to recite Kiddush at the beginning of Shabbat. However, Maimonides' comments do not indicate the manner in which the mitzvah of tzipur is comparable to the mitzvah of Kiddush.

It is clear from Maimonides' comments that he regards as ambiguous the statement in the Torah that we are to recall the day that we left Egypt. He refers us to the enigmatic comparison to Kiddush to provide an explanation for this statement. Given that the meaning of this statement – that we are to recall the day of our redemption – is unclear, it seems odd that Maimonides should select this passage as the source in Torah for the commandment of tzipur. After all, as noted above, there is a perfectly clear passage that also discusses the commandment of tzipur. We are commanded to retell the events to our children. Why did Maimonides

not use this passage as the source for the commandment and instead insist that the source is the more ambiguous directive to remember the day of our redemption?

“And you should tell your son on that day saying, “Because of this Hashem did (this) for me when I went out from Egypt.” (Sefer Shemot 13:8)

“One might think that the mitzvah of tzipur can be fulfilled from the first of the month. But the Torah tells us “on that day.” If the Torah only said, “on that day”, one might conclude that the mitzvah can be fulfilled before night-fall. Therefore the Torah tells us, “because of this.” “Because of this” only refers to the time at which matzah and maror are before you.” (Haggadah of Pesach)

The passage above is the pasuk that tells us that the mitzvah of tzipur requires that we retell the events of our redemption to our children. The Haggadah quotes Mechilta's explanation of this pasuk. Mechilta learns from this passage that the mitzvah of tzipur can only be fulfilled on the night of Pesach – at the time that matzah and maror are before us.

This discussion in Mechilta deserves careful analysis. Mechilta proposes that one might reasonably assume that the mitzvah of tzipur can be fulfilled from the beginning of the month of Nisan. This is a remarkable statement! Why would one make such an assumption? Either it is self-evident that the mitzvah of tzipur is related to Pesach or it is not self-evident! If we assume that it is self-evident that the mitzvah is one of the mitzvot of Pesach, then obviously it cannot be fulfilled from the beginning of the month. Alternatively, if it is not self-evident that the mitzvah is related to Pesach, why would one conclude that the mitzvah can be fulfilled only from the beginning of the month of Nisan? If one does not assume that the mitzvah of tzipur is related to Pesach, then why could it not be fulfilled any time during the year?

“This month should be for you the first of the months. It should be for you the first of the months of the year.” (Sefer Shemot 12:2)

This passage instructs us to designate the month of Nisan as the first of the months of the year. Nachmanides, in his comments on this passage, explains that Nisan is selected as the first month of the year because it is the month of our redemption. All other months are identified in their relationship to Nisan. For example, Iyar is identified as the second month of the year and Tishrei is the seventh month of the year. Nachmanides further explains that this system is designed to assure that we constantly recall and

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Passover



make reference to the redemption. Each time we identify the date and mention the month, we will identify the month in relationship to Nisan – the month of our redemption.[5]

It seems from Nachmanides' comments that the month of Nisan has a unique identity. It is the month of our redemption. In other words, the events that took place in Nisan actually endow the month with an identity. It is the month associated with redemption.

Based on these comments, we can begin to understand the reasoning of Mechilta. Mechilta assumes that the mitzvah of tzippur can only be fulfilled at a time that is relevant to the redemption that tzippur recalls. However, Mechilta proposes that this requirement can be fulfilled from the beginning of Nisan. Nisan has a unique identity. It is the month of our redemption. Therefore, one would reasonably assume that the mitzvah of tzippur can be fulfilled from the beginning of the month.

However, Mechilta explains that we cannot fulfill the mitzvah of tzippur from the beginning of the month. The mitzvah can only be fulfilled at the time that we have matzah and maror before us. In other words, Mechilta posits that

the mitzvah of tzippur is somehow tied to the other mitzvot performed on the night of Pesach. What is this connection between tzippur and the other mitzvot of Pesach?

Let us now return to our original question. What is the connection between tzippur and Kiddush? Maimonides provides a succinct definition of the mitzvah of Kiddush. He tells us that the mitzvah of Kiddush is to describe the greatness of Shabbat, its exalted and distinctive nature that differentiates it from the other days of the week.[6] In short, the mitzvah of Kiddush is to express in words the significance of Shabbat – the day we are prepared to observe.

Apparently, we cannot adequately observe the Shabbat by simply abstaining from the activities that are prohibited on the day. We must first express in words the significance of this observance. Mere abstention from creative labor is not an adequate observance of Shabbat. We must first explain the significance of this conduct.

Perhaps, this is the basis of Maimonides' comparison between tzippur and Kiddush. Tzippur's objective is similar to the objective of

Kiddush. We are required to provide – through tzippur – an explanation of the mitzvot we are to perform on the night of Pesach. Just as Kiddush provides an explanation of the observance of Shabbat, tzippur provides an explanation and framework for the mitzvot performed the night of Pesach.

We can now appreciate the reasoning of Mechilta. In order to relate Kiddush to Shabbat, we recite the Kiddush at the advent of Shabbat. However, the entire month of Nisan has the identity of the month of our redemption. The entire month is related to and is an extension of the observances performed the night of Pesach. Therefore, one might reasonably assume that the mitzvah of tzippur can be performed from the beginning of the month. However, the Torah tells us that the performance of tzippur must be more closely related to the mitzvot of the night of Pesach. It must be performed at the time at which these mitzvot of Pesach are performed.

Let us now consider our second question on Maimonides. Why did Maimonides not cite as the source for the mitzvah of tzippur the more explicit pasuk requiring us to retell the events of our redemption to our children? The passage that instructs us to retell these events to our children provides us with clear instructions for the manner in which the mitzvah of tzippur is to be performed. However, the passage tells us nothing about the nature of the mitzvah. In contrast, the passage telling us to recall the day of our redemption provides us with an insight into the meaning and significance of the mitzvah. The passage employs language similar and reminiscent of the language the Torah uses to describe the mitzvah of Kiddush. Through alluding to this comparison, the passage reveals to us that the mitzvah of tzippur is fundamentally similar to the mitzvah of Kiddush. Both are designed to provide a framework for the observances that will follow. ■

[1] Sefer Shemot 13:8.

[2] Sefer Shemot 13:3.

[3] Sefer Shemot 20:8.

[4] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Mishne Torah, Hilchot Shabbat 29:1.

[5] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Nachman (Ramban / Nachmanides), Commentary on Sefer Shemot 12:2.

[6] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Sefer HaMitzvot, Mitzvat Aseh 155.

*Passover is the only
holiday with two versions:
the 1st while in bondage,
and the 2nd, once freed.
Since the holiday is one
where we contrast "bond-
age to freedom" to engen-
der our thanks for God's
kindness, two points in
our history required
commemoration.*

and all others celebrated after the Torah was given. Why are there only one Sukkos, and one Shavuot? What aspect of Passover demands two versions? The Talmud and Haggadah also teach that we are obligated to view ourselves as if we were redeemed from Egypt, and that we must also recline while eating matza and drinking the four cups of wine to express this newfound freedom. And, "even if we are all wise...all knowing the Torah", we are still obligated to recount the Exodus. But why? How can we learn more, if we already know this story inside out? We then read of every generation who attempts to destroy us, but that God saves us. We recount Laban's evil, and God's salvation; we recount at great length the Egyptians' evils, and how God heard our cry, and saved us with miracles. Another law is that when reciting the Haggadah, we must recount our history, commencing with our degraded events and concluding with our praiseworthy status: we commence with our having been slaves and idolaters, and conclude with God's redemption and granting us Torah. We follow this theme with the recital of Hallel, praising God. Astonishingly, our Haggadah that recounts so much about our life in Egypt and God's plagues, mentions Moses just once: Maimonides' Haggadah omits Moses' name altogether. We would think Moses' role in Passover should be present. Why is Moses of little or no focus? Although we have cited many laws, there is one reason for all of them...can you determine it? If not, let's investigate further.

Pesach – Matza – Maror

"Rabbi Gamliel taught, 'Anyone who does not explain three matters on Passover, does not fulfill his obligation; the Paschal lamb, matza and the bitter herbs'."

What is the significance of the Paschal lamb? As we recount our history in the Haggadah, we learn of our state as idolaters before Abraham's times, and God's oath to make us a great nation. We learn of our Egyptian bondage and God's miracles. Why did God deliver so many plagues? God desired to direct Pharaoh and his people to the error in their ways, and each plague targeted another misconception. The first three plagues displayed God's sovereignty over Earth; the next three, over Earthly events; and the last three, over the heavens. All three realms, Earth, the heavens, and all in between are shown to be under God's control: the Egyptian gods could do nothing to deflect God's plagues. Finally, when Pharaoh sustained his denial of God, God delivered a plague inexplicable by nature: firstborn deaths. Thereby, God taught conclusively of His exclusive reign as Creator

and Governor of the universe: as He created everything, He alone controls all natural laws, and no realm escapes His control. We learn of our Egyptian bondage, and the central flaw of our oppressors: they worshipped something other than God. And we learn how God attempts to offer man truth before delivering the final blow.

To be entitled to freedom and accept a Torah from the true God, we must understand what "God" refers to. If we assume the Egyptian meaning, we do not deserve redemption. Thus, God commanded our sacrifice of the Egyptian deity, the Paschal lamb. It is only through this sacrifice, that we deny the false god and affirm the true God, earning our delivery from a bitter existence to taste freedom: embodied in matza, as it could not rise due to God's swift delivery.

The Paschal lamb is the Egyptian god; an idolatrous culture which projects its fantasies onto reality, also projecting its need for human domination, which caused our embittered, slave existence. For this reason, when no Temple exists and no Paschal lamb is sacrificed, the bitter herbs also cannot be fulfilled as a Torah law, but are only Rabbinic. The bitter herbs (our bitter existence) result from the lamb-worshipping culture who feels favored by their gods, and who can justifiably oppress others who devour their God, "For the Egyptians could not eat bread together with the Hebrews, for it is an abomination to the Egyptians." (Onkelos; Exod. 43:32)

Our Torah law reflects this relationship between idolatry and oppression, by commanding the bitter herbs only be eaten when the idolatrous Paschal lamb is present. Exodus 12:8 reads, "And you shall eat the flesh on that night, roasted by fire, with matza and bitter herbs you shall eat it (the Paschal lamb)." It teaches of the relationship between the matza and bitter herbs, that they depend on the Paschal lamb. Meaning, it is through the denial of the lamb-god that we earned a delivery from the bitter life, to taste freedom: the matza.

Passover's Objective

As Rabbi Gamliel teaches, explaining this triad forms our primary obligation in Haggadah: 1) killing the idolatrous Paschal lamb (Pesach) is the means by which we earn redemption from 2) bitterness (maror) to 3) freedom (matza). Without explaining these three, we do not fulfill our command, and for good reason.

The goal of Passover is to engender a feeling of appreciation for God, who took us out of Egypt. God transformed our slave nation into a dignified, free people who received Divine laws

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Passover



for our own good. To emphasize this contrast and to create our real sense of thanks, Passover is the only holiday possessing two forms: A) the Egyptian Passover, and B) all later Passovers. The objective of these two holidays is to highlight this very contrast of our having A) been slaves, and B) our present freedom. Samson Raphael Hirsch states the reason for the Egyptian Passover: we were to focus on our “current” bondage, eating poor man’s bread, bitter herbs and sacrificing the lamb...to be contrasted suddenly by God’s swift salvation. We must realize we did nothing to cause our salvation: it was God alone. This contrast is the key aspect of Passover. For it is only through contrasting bondage to freedom, that we might feel thankful to God. Therefore, Passover is the only holidays with two versions: since the holiday is one where “contrasting” our “bondage to freedom” is the focus, so as to engender our thanks for God’s kindness.

We therefore recline to embellish our freedom, and recount our tragedies followed by our successes, again offering a ‘contrast’ and thanks for the good God bestowed upon us. This explains why we are obligated to view ourselves as if we were redeemed from Egypt. Now, “even if we are wise...”, we are still obligated to

recount the Exodus”. Why is this? The answer: this is not an exercise in “learning”, but in generating “appreciation”, something we must and can do yearly. So it matters none that we repeat what we know already, as wise, elderly Jews. For even at that prime age, we must renew our appreciation for God who redeemed us. And as our appreciation reaches its crescendo, we recite the Hallel, as an expression of our thanks, for true thanks would be lacking, if we were not moved towards expression. We might also suggest that Moses’ role is downplayed in the Haggadah, since God is to retain full focus of our appreciation.

Matza recalls poor man’s bread, but also teaches of God’s salvation. So when no Temple exists and the sacrifice cannot be brought, despite the absence of the means of our redemption – killing the Egyptian god – we may still eat matza, as matza embodies the “objective” of Passover. Of course we lack the complete picture portrayed in the triad of “Pesach, Matza and Maror”, nonetheless, Passover’s objective of matza – “redemption” – is significant enough to stand alone. So significant is the objective of freedom embodied in matza that the Torah verses command us in matza again by itself, (12:18) in addition to the matza commanded to

be eaten with the Paschal lamb and the bitter herbs.

This holiday is called the “Holiday of Matzas” and not the “Holiday of Pesach” to emphasize the matza’s independent lesson, not reliant on the lamb or the herbs. However, bitter herbs are commanded only when the Paschal lamb is present, as we said, for they reflect the bitterness associated with the culture deifying the lamb-god. More precisely, our bitter bondage was a result of an idolatrous culture, devoid of Divine morality. Therefore, the two – bitter herbs and the lamb – are inseparable. We cannot talk about a bitter bondage if the cause of that bitterness – idolatry (the lamb) – is absent. So with no Paschal lamb, there are no bitter herbs. But since matza embodies the overall objective of “redemption”, and since the Torah commands eating matza even when no Paschal lamb is present, matza retains an independent role.

Summary

God designed us to find the most satisfaction when we engage our highest element: our intellects. It is our intellect that we sense as our center, and it is only when we engage our intellect that we will find the most profound sense of purpose and satisfaction. For this reason, God delivered us from Egyptian bondage, with the objective of giving us the Torah. Regardless of our state of affairs, the Torah lifestyle will definitely brings us towards fulfillment and happiness. Perhaps, it is for this reason that the Talmud teaches, even a poor person must recline, for even though impoverished and with no means, he must realize that the redemption applies to everyone and affects everyone, poor and rich alike. The Torah system was given to an entire “people”, not to an individual. As such, is must be God’s meaning that Torah improves everyone’s life. We commence the Haggadah with the words, “all who are in need, come and eat.”

Torah laws target specific areas, from relationships to objects of mitzva, from seasons to daily needs, and from actions to proper thoughts. Passover, which too contains many truths, carries the broader goal of imbuing us with an appreciation for God’s redemption. Truly, Passover targets the general feeling of “appreciating God”. It is through all these laws that Passover leads us towards recognition that God created us, and governs us with His intervention and His gift of Torah. It is only through following Torah law and philosophy, that we will indeed become joyous in our lives. With that thought, I wish a truly happy Passover to everyone. ■

the Bigger Lie

Lying to Other Religions Hurts Jew and Gentile

(The following is response sent to the Forward following its article on Rabbi Avi Weiss' hosting of Cardinals to engage his Torah students in dialogue)

"Any Gentile who engages in Torah is akin to the Jewish High Priest". (Bab. Talmud) To offer this opportunity to Gentiles, Jews must accurately present God's Torah: a gross failure of Rabbi Avi Weiss, dean of Chovevei Torah.

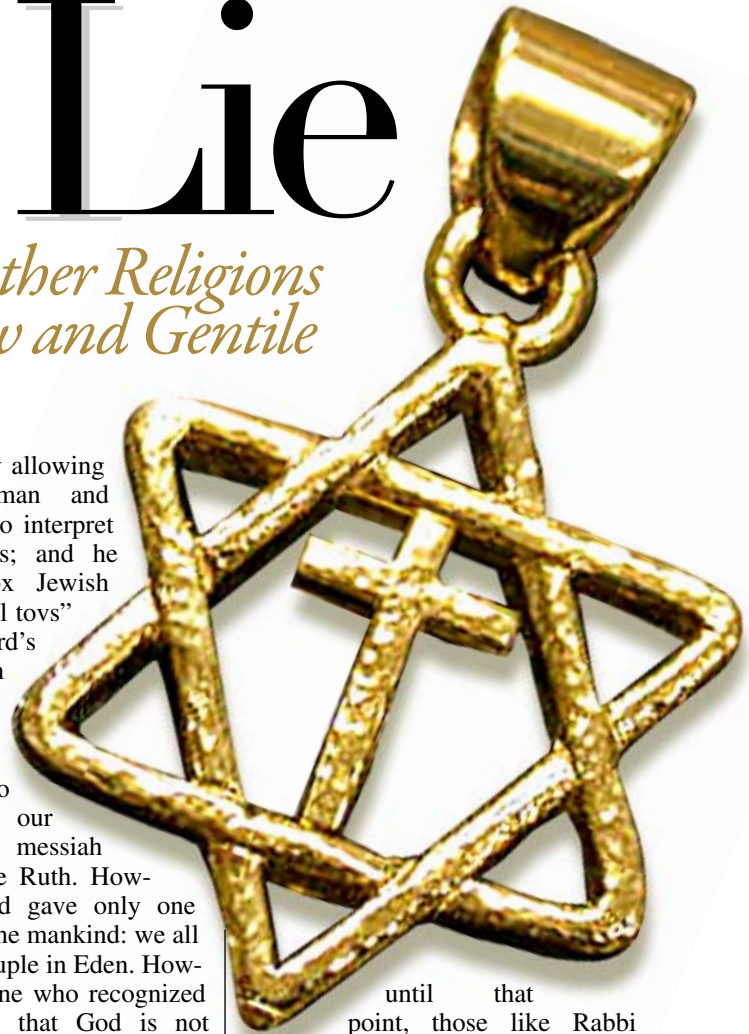
As reported in "Cardinals Study With Orthodox Students" (March 31, 2006) Rabbi Avi Weiss organized theological discussions between Catholic clerics and orthodox yeshiva students, lying to Gentile and Jew. Unlike blind faith religions, Judaism is a proof-based system: claims of Divine inspiration must be proven, while Catholic notions of human deification, and the murder of God, are dismissed due to their impossible nature, just as any impossibility in science is dismissed. Faith-based religions share no commonalities with Judaism, explaining why Judaism's great minds like Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik and Rabbi Moshe Feinstein zt'l prohibited interfaith dialogue. This is not due to animosity towards peoples: Judaism takes issue with theories, not individuals. As other religions possess no proof of Divine inspiration, while God revealed Himself at Sinai to over two million Jews, Judaism remains validated as the only God-given religion. Hence, interfaith dialogue is prohibited since there is no other religion, which may share God's word with us: as they are bereft of God's prophecies, dialogue is therefore meaningless.

Rabbi Weiss does not represent Judaism: he duped all attendees that Judaism recognizes

Catholicism's Divinity by allowing student Michael Katzman and bishop Guy de Kerimel to interpret New Testament passages; and he encouraged his orthodox Jewish students' "chorus of mazel tovs" for Jean-Pierre Ricard's promotion from bishop...thereby celebrating idolatry, Judaism's worst sin.

In design, a Jew is no greater than a Gentile: our greatest kings and our messiah descend from the Gentile Ruth. However, history proves God gave only one religion, and made only one mankind: we all descend from that first couple in Eden. However, it was Abraham alone who recognized and taught monotheism: that God is not subject to His created Earthly phenomena, like trinities, ignorance and changing His mind concerning religions, and His death. This is why God entrusted Abraham and his seed from Israel to receive and teach His Torah to Jew and Gentile alike. Those like Rabbi Weiss professing acceptance of alien religions deny God's will, and fool others into believing that world religions are also Divinely inspired: an evil to Gentile and Jew alike.

When Rabbis no longer seek recognition from man-made religions, or photo ops with their leaders, but instead, unabashedly help those religionists to understand their flaws, and the true proofs and science of Judaism, the nations will be in awe of Torah, as much as they are in awe of the cosmos: both equally displaying God's infinite wisdom, not so of man-made religions like Catholicism. But



until that point, those like Rabbi Weiss keep Gentiles in the dark, and the nations will see nothing but a Judaism denouncing their man-god, without reason, condemning us to sustained anti-Semitism. If only Jewish leaders would no longer hide Torah's rational refutations of other religions, displaying the perfection of our laws, all peoples would echo today's intelligent Noachides, and claim, "Truly, what a wise and understanding people is the great nation." (Deut. IV)

*Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim, founder
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4 Steps to Running a Seder Like a Pro!

RABBI PINCHAS ROSENTHAL

Invite Voldemort, the Evil Emperor and the Lord of the Rings to your Seder: Real-world strategies for successful Seder making for ages 4-40

"Can we eat yet!?" This classic refrain rings out at many a Seder every year. The central question is, "Why is the Seder a source of boredom to so many children (and adults)?" The simple answer is that it is difficult to make the story of the Exodus relevant to our lives and the lives of our children. The reading of the Hebrew text, even if you understand it, has very little immediate connection to the lives we live in America in 2006. Yet the Hagadah demands "we see ourselves as if we ourselves have left Egypt". This is a tall order!

Step #1

Understand the nature of the mitzvah of "Sippur Yitziat Mitzrayim" - telling the story of the Exodus. The Hagadah tells us that the Torah itself mentions four sons - one wise, one wicked, one simple and one who can't formulate a question. What role does that play in this Mitzvah? The Mitzvot of Lulav, Tefillin and Mezuzah do not distinguish between different types of people. Why should "Sippur Yitziat Mitzrayim"?

The source of the mitzvah of "Sippur" emerges from the verse "V'higadeta L'vincha" "and you shall tell your child." We know that the obligation

exists even when there is no child present, so why is the child the prime expression of the Mitzvah?

One possible reason is that by framing the mitzvah between the parent and child it brings out the exact character and methodology of the mitzvah. The parent must be careful to present the material to each child in a manner that his immature psyche can see and be impacted by the story. This would also apply to recounting the story to any person whose understanding is less than yours. He is your "Son" relative to you. As Chazal say in the verse "V'shinantam Le'vanecha" "and you shall diligently teach your son (Torah)", "son" refers to your (non-biological) children, i.e., your students.

Step #2

Better understand the primary concepts of Seder night - "Shibud Ve'geulah" - "Slavery and Redemption." What was the nature of the servitude of Egypt? What do you call a group of people being controlled by a charismatic leader whose subjects view him as a divine being, who are governed in an authoritarian manner with mind control techniques and who are deceived to fulfill his agenda?

This is a cult.

Egypt was an example of a cult that existed on the state level. Egyptologists tell us that Paroh was viewed as a manifestation of the gods on earth. He was the only one who could gain the gods' contentment. He was their head priest. All people were fearful of his power over life and death. He had a whole host of "Chartumin", magicians, who used elaborate magic tricks to attribute bizarre power to Paroh. Yosef in the previous generation had centralized all the land and great wealth into the hands of Paroh. While most citizens in Egypt were serfs to Paroh, all people in Egypt were slaves to his agenda. Some people had more personal liberties and some had much less. The Ramban tells us how Paroh used a work tax to force the Jews to be increasingly involved in the royal construction projects. In this environment, the assimilated Jews who were totally under the sway of the Paroh cult of personality were quick to be absorbed into his evil plot.

What was the nature of the Geulah - the redemption?

God's removal of the Jews from Egypt was a gradual educational process for both Egyptians and Jews revealing the fraud of Paroh's control. The 10 plagues demonstrated that Paroh's mastery over God's world was mere illusion. The system of idolatry that was used gain favor over the gods was exposed for the "big lie" that it was. The freedom to choose a life based on God's agenda and not Paroh was presented to the Jews. Those Jews who had the maturity and courage to leave the security of the Paroh state sacrificed the Korban Pesach; those

who clung to the well-entrenched illusions of Egypt did not, and perished. We celebrate the fact that God liberated us from a life where our minds were locked in falseness and manipulations, where no real decision was ours. He brought us to Mount Sinai where a new vision of the world was presented and we chose to live a life of freedom from lies, manipulations and evil agendas.

Step #3

Know the world of your child. What metaphors of evil controlling figures is he attracted to? What are his favorite movies? Find out before the Seder so you can be properly prepared. Whether it is Voldemort from "Harry Potter", the Emperor from "Star Wars" or the Ring from "Lord of the Rings", these are rich source materials that enable you to bridge his world to the Seder. By eliciting his deep understanding of these stories you will be able to give real meaning to Paroh and his empire. Probe and ask him questions to describe the world of these "cult" leaders. Function as the "guide on the side and not the sage on the stage". Allow him to grasp the feeling of being manipulated into slavery. Help him see the sense of helplessness. Have him experience the fear of Paroh and his henchmen. Show him how all the plagues would allow him to see the underlying weakness and fragility of Paroh and his "mighty" empire. Bring to his mind the need for life-giving Geulah - redemption. Have him experience the real joy and gratitude to God of being able to have the freedom to choose life and not being forced to live a life of lies.

Step #4

Use proper timing, props, costumes and candy to make the experience powerful. Do not wait for the middle of the Seder. Your child has limited energy and attention. Start right after Yachatz with each child. Inform your other Seder participants, before the Seder, that you are going to engage one-on-one with each child. They are free to go ahead without you or discuss amongst themselves any other topic. They should not feel insulted.

The gold standard of "Sippur Yitziat Mitzrayim" is to have the children notice some uniqueness of the evening and initiate the questioning.

Excuse yourself and come out with a costume or prop that will engage the children and is a perfect springboard for your "lesson plan"

Give the children candy for each question they raise. Provide a snack bag so they place all there candy and tell them they can eat some now and the rest latter. (Otherwise, they will be exclusively focused on the candy)

For older kids offer money, for example, 25 cents a question or answer.

FAILURE TO PLAN, IS PLANNING TO FAIL! HAVE A CHAG SAMEACH! ■

Astonished!

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

We read in Isaiah 6:3 that the angels “called one to the other and said, ‘Holy, Holy, Holy is God of hosts, the entire universe is filled with His honor.’” To mimic a perfect sentiment of those perfect beings, we repeat these words in our Kedusha three times each morning. We also stand all day on Yom Kippur, again, an attempt to target the perfection of the angels, who metaphorically “stand” as they have no knee joints. Of course, angels are not physical beings, and we know not what they truly are. But to realize our ignorance and our desire to reach perfection, we mimic those perfected beings. Of course, we must ask what perfection is expressed in the angels’ first “calling to one another”, and then responding together in praise of the Creator. Why must one call to the other first?

Planetary nebula, the glowing remains of a dying, Sun-like star. This stellar relic, first spied by William Herschel in 1787, is nicknamed the “Eskimo” Nebula (NGC 2392) because, when viewed through ground-based telescopes, it resembles a face surrounded by a fur parka.

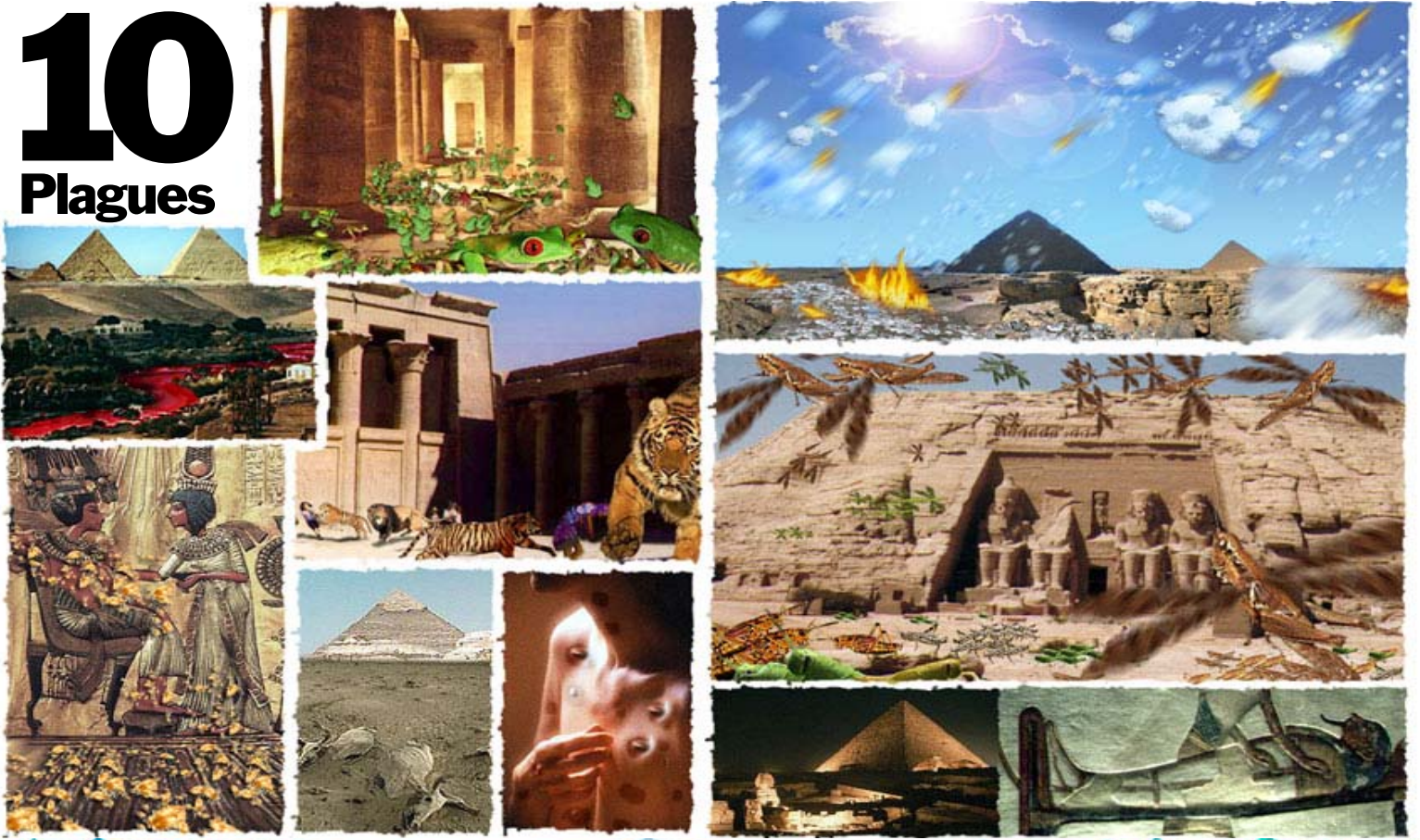


An interesting parallel is located in the source for our “Zimun” blessing, which precedes our Birchat Hamazone. The Talmud teaches a dispute as to the source for Zimun. One view is the verse, “Praise God with me, and we will exalt His name as one”. The other verse is, “For the name of God I call, [we shall] give greatness to our God”. In either verse, one person is calling to at least one other, so as to praise God together, paralleling the angels. Thus, we find a theme in the Torah. A “theme” meaning that which is of great enough importance, that it deserves God’s repetition. So what is this importance of one being calling to another?

I believe the lesson here, is to emphasize the astounding nature of the Creator. When wishing to bless God, it is initiated by our recognition of His exclusive role as the Creator of the universe. This universe is so stupendous, and could not have created itself. We are forced to seek a “Source” for these grand galaxies and billions of stars, let alone the Earthly marvels. And when we realize how great the Creator of all these must be...we cannot remain silent. We must communicate this amazement. Much like the sentiment expressed when seeing a shooting start “Hey, did you see that?!” is the sentiment expressed by both angel, and man. Not that angels experience human amazement, but they apparently find wonder in the universe. They too are created, and realize the necessity of a Creator. Both intelligent creations – angel and man – find awe in the universe, to the degree that one cannot tolerate remaining silent. Both call to their peers.

These verses teach us that this response, of “how amazing the universe is”, is an essential idea. It forms a theme in Torah, explaining its repetition. Man cannot simply recognize the Creator, but he must become so overwhelmed by God, since this “calling to another” is the only acceptable reaction when recognizing God, and any less a reaction reflects a flaw in our makeup. Man must not simply recognize God, but he must be astonished. ■

10 Plagues



Splitting of the Red Sea



MAIMONIDES
13 PRINCIPLES
Judaism's Fundamentals

God: the Cause & the First

*The following dialogue is
taken from our new interac-
tive forum at this link:
www.mesora.org/discussions
Feel free to participate.*

Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim: Maimonides' 1st Principle is that God exists, and He is the Cause for everything else. His 4th Principle is that God is the "First", existing before everything else. What is the distinction between these two principles; what does the 4th Principle add?

Aurora: The first principle says that God is the cause of everything else. Now this could be interpreted as regarding just the present. By saying that He is the "First", existing before everything else. It is made clear that everything was created by Him at any time and that He is eternal.

Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim: Aurora, I disagree. For if we say that God is the cause of everything in Principle I, then we encompass all times; past present, and Principle 4 remains unnecessary. Think about it and see if you understand my response; if you agree with me, search for another possibility.

Aurora: I understood your response. Now the fact that God existed prior to everything can be figure out from the 1st principle (He is the Cause for everything else), and the fact that God exists after everything can also be figure out from the 1st Principle (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). It seems that Principle IV and all that can be derived from it could be figured out by Principle I. What is that I am missing?

Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim: Aurora, I believe the answer is this: although from the First Principle we learn that God Caused everything...this does not necessarily mean He came first. An example: a man causes its shadow, but does not precede the shadow. But without the hand, there cannot be any shadow...so the hand "causes" the shadow. But Maimonides wishes to teach that God also came before everything else, not only that He is the cause...and this is a Fundamental of Judaism. Therefore, his Fourth Principle is that God is truly First, in addition to being the cause. If I am not mistaken, Aristotle's view of the universe was that God was the cause, but that universe existed simultaneously with God, always. The universe to God is like His shadow...both always coexisting. The question: why is this a violation of Torah thought, and reality?

In Genesis, God teaches that He created everything, and there was a time where nothing but He existed. This is a factual answer, but more essentially, if we accept Aristotle, then we diminish the greatness of God, by claiming He could not bring matter into existence from nothingness, which is the Torah's view. Claiming Aristotle's view, God did not bring everything into existence from nothingness, and this belittles God. This is why Maimonides classifies this idea of creation ex nihilo (from nothing) as a Torah Fundamental. Without this concept, our view of God is not correct. ■

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

Islam is Lame

Reader: Islam fully recognizes Judaism. The same God who sent the Koran, sent the original religion [Judaism]. Islam does state that the Jews corrupted the religion in later years. Hence God sent JESUS to reform the JEWS and bring them to the original path. Why do you say Prophet Muhammad was a false? Do you have a proof? While Islam says JUDISM and Christianity are true religions originally, the JEWS and Christians in turn say that Islam is FALSE. What a way to thank Islam!!!!

Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim: You write, "The same God who sent the Koran, sent Judaism" and, "God sent JESUS to reform the JEWS and bring them to the original path".

Why do you make claims with no proof, then demand Judaism to provide proof? You abide by contradictory methods of validation.

However, unlike all other religions, Judaism does indeed possess proof: the historical event of Revelation at Sinai witnessed by over 2 million people. The same method of proof, which validates all histories. Islam and all other religions have no such proof. This is why other religions are lies.

You add that Judaism should reciprocate Islam's recognition of us...and this would be an appropriate "thanks". But for what do you feel we must give thanks? Do you assume in some way Islam assists Judaism? Judaism possesses proof of our religion, without Islam's recognition, or any other corroboration. Once Sinai proves Judaism, nothing more is needed. I will add that Islam's recognition of Judaism and Christianity was a ploy: as they wished recognition for their newly formed "Islam" (originally star and moon worship...see their flag) Muslims used the tactic of "recognizing" other religions to gain popularity. Eventually, Islam claimed "responsibility" for the other religions, claiming they gave Moses and Jesus to both religions. This is openly stated in their Koran, along with many other revisionist verses. Their marketing strategy was the same as Hitler's: say a lie so preposterous, and so often, and the world won't feel you would have invented it. ■

A Noa Chide

Reader: I read in "The Path of a Righteous Gentile" that theft, however small, is punishable by death for Noachides but not for Jews. So if I take even a toothpick without asking for permission, the Court has to sentence me to death. What is your take on this? And why are Noachides held

to the higher standard?

I have also been told I have to go before a Bet Din in order to live as a Noachide, and be under the strict supervision of a rabbi. People are attempting to do this by e-mail (e.g., through the Yahoo NoachideChassid group). I would need to do it in person. E-mail is just too impersonal. You can't really get to know anyone that way. So, wouldn't it be OK if I, a 62 year old man, just do my best to live by the Seven Noachide Laws, which are really just ethical principles? Will I burn in hell if I don't submit to a Bet Din?

It seems that the famous early Noachide, Aime Palliere, did just that. In fact, he remained a nominal Catholic until the day he died, and was buried by the rites of the Church. And it seems his mentor, Rabbi Elijah Benamozegh, encouraged him to do just that. All he was required to do was to reject the Trinity, the Incarnation, and the idea that the Torah was abolished for Jews. I myself reject all three of these things.

Anyway, Rabbi, if you can respond to these questions, I will probably not bother you with many more, or any more for a good while.

Thanks, and Blessings, John

Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim: 1) Noachides meet with death for stealing any amount, since their system of 7 Noachide laws is the minimum requirement of life. If a man cannot keep even these 7 laws, then his life is worthless, and deserves death for his infraction of the 7 Noachide Laws as a "unit", not merely for stealing a toothpick. The Jew is held to an even higher standard, and must keep far more laws. He is not killed for stealing; as doing so has not demonstrated an abandonment of the rest of his laws...merely one was violated. Although for stealing, a Jew has not forfeited the rest of the system, he would be killed for his sins, in his system as well.

2) You need not attend a bet din to practice Noachide law. You simply practice it.

3) Your denial of the Trinity, the Incarnation, and the idea that the Torah was abolished for Jews are all applauded. But you cannot remain observing any other Christian idea. You must denounce all alien religious notions, outside of what Judaism teaches. Although Noachides are required to keep a minimum of 7 laws, the rest of the Torah will perfect you as it perfects a Jew. Following any other religion will destroy you.

As you examine each one of your prior beliefs, you will see their fallacy, and Noachide/Jewish Torah life means denouncing fallacy, and cleaving to truth. Feel free to use our site to search for answers, or continue your emails to me.

(continued on next page)

Meant to Be?

Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim: This week, someone mentioned the notion of “meant to be” in connection with our freewill, and claimed as follows: “A person is free to decide his decisions, and will be rewarded for his mitzvahs, and punished for his sins. However, since God knows everything, God also knew what this person was going to do, so it was ‘meant to be’.” It is a paradox: on the one hand, since God knows all, this man cannot do other than what God knows he will do. On the other hand, man is the sole cause of his actions.”

This person accepted a contradiction, which is unnecessary, and which can be easily resolved. My response is as follows: God’s knowledge of our actions before performed is not a “cause” of our actions. How God knows future events, or anything...Maimonides states is beyond human grasp. But in no way does God’s foreknowledge suspend or tamper with man’s free will. The Torah fundamental of Reward and Punishment clearly teaches that all man does is his own doing: he is to blame for evil, and is to be rewarded for his good. To suggest otherwise contradicts reason, as we all know we are in total control of our actions, and it also contradicts God’s Torah fundamentals located throughout the Torah.

The Talmud teaches, “All is in God’s hand, except man’s free will”. Therefore, nothing in human activity is “meant to be”, if man alone does not wish it to be. Nothing external to man contributes to his actions. Man is in complete control, and uses his mind and freewill to the exclusion of any other imagined force, as God intended in granting us these faculties.

People have an emotional need to be saved from their faulty decisions. Claiming “all is meant for the good” or “everything has a reason” is man’s escape hatch, through which, he or she is no longer accountable for foolish actions. It is a post-fact means to mitigate our errors. But reality and Torah teaches otherwise: many high-level people made devastating errors, which at times, cost them their lives: Korach and Achitophel for example. And the Torah never states, “it was meant to be”! God would much prefer that man did not sin. It is this reality that should frighten us from remaining ignorant about important matters, for God will hold us accountable, as He did with Korach. Although many people claim, “all is meant to be”, this phrase’s popularity, even among the religious, is no support for this notion, since it contradicts God’s Torah, and reason.

Perhaps it is “meant to be” that we disprove this belief?! ■

Deifying Ghosts

Reader: Your article on a Rabbi accepting Jesus was very interesting, to say the least. How much of this exits and goes on without any notice or publicity? Recently I saw a video that showed what was going on in “770” or Chabad, NY. The lines of individuals going past the Rebbe’s chair with an empty wine cup, going through the motions of accepting wine from an imaginary person, then singing “Moshiach”. Is this what may be considered “idol worship”?

-David

Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim: I recently spoke to someone who thoroughly investigated Chabad and interviewed its members, and corroborates your story. Although both practices deny reality and Torah principles, idol worship would be one step closer to reality than what these Chabad members perpetrate, in your case. In Chabad’s case, their members’ fantasy life is worse, as they don’t only deify a person, but imagine ghosts. These members of Chabad completely deny God’s words, which Moses reminds the Jews: “And greatly guard your lives, for you did not see any form [of God] on the day that God spoke to you at Sinai from amidst the flames” (Deut. 4:15) Chabad members deny this, claiming they do in fact accept that the Rebbe is sitting in front of them. Moses says not to imagine you saw something when you did not, and they say, “Imagine what you wish, and it is true”. The phenomenon of masses passing by the empty Rebbe’s chair, imagining him to be there, and then “accepting wine from is cup”, displays a group of people whose minds are completely disengaged: they in no way represent Judaism. What is worse, Chabad’s leaders promote this, and from the anti-messianic Chabad members we should hear a public denunciation as idolatrous behavior, not reflecting Judaism. God hid Moses’ grave for fear of this very human deification. Chabad’s leaders who value Torah must correct this problem, as no others can reach this insular community. Today’s masses blindly follow suit claiming, “Look how much good Chabad does”. But there is no good performed when thousands of “shluchim” (messengers) proliferate such behaviors in the name of Judaism. I speak to Chabad people, and so many times, they have no idea what they are talking about, as if in some trance, repeating a script.

This quite recent movement of Chabad might have its seeds of Torah deviation in its shift from focusing on Torah and our Fundamentals, to Tanya and Zohar. They elevate these cryptic books as more central to Judaism than the Torah itself. It displays their over-attachment to man – the books

authors – than to God. For if they studied the Torah, they would read that our greatest leaders’ sins are never hidden, God is to retain human focus, and that the Torah is based in reason, not fantasy.

I cannot speak for all, but Chabad members and books focus on imagined properties of God, like their “tzimtzum” deviation, where they say God had to contract Himself, or some “light” of Himself, to make space for the universe during creation...as if God actually occupies space. That is outright heresy, to equate God in anyway to the physical world. They get absorbed in discussions of angels, “spherot” and other matters, which they cannot explain, and would tell you if you are not Chabad, then your Judaism is incomplete. Accordingly, Moses and every prophet were not as perfect as God said. One Chabad Rabbi claimed that there is some “spiritual holiness” in one’s beard, explaining why he does not ever trim it. And they apparently view their dress as some religious rite, when nowhere in Torah did God command man to dress in black and white, grow a beard, and always don a hat. This group imagines things, and then claims their imagination is part of Judaism. However, Torah is always demanding man to cleave to reality: “Recall what Amalek did to you on the path” (Deut. 25:17), and “You have been shown to know that God is Elokim, there is no other besides Him. From the heavens He made you hear His voice to instruct you, and on land, He has shown you His great fire and His words you heard from amidst the flames.” (Deut. 4:35,36), “Lest you forget the matters that your eyes have seen” (Deut. 4:9), and “do not go astray after the [imagination of] your heart” (Num. 15:39), and finally, “All that matter that I command to you, it shall you guard to do; do not add to it, and do not detract from it.” (Deut. 13:1)

God’s Torah has one message: follow what you “perceived” and “know”; what you have “seen and heard”; and what your mind tells you is true. This is in order that you shall “know” matters, not simply follow baseless beliefs like other religions. God said, “do not go astray after the [imagination of] your heart”, yet they imagine their Rebbe sitting in front of them. God granted us intelligence, to distinguish between baseless blind faith, and proven fact and knowledge. Had belief been all God desired, He would not have granted mankind intellect, nor would He write in His Torah, “You have been proven to Know”. God desires man obtain “proof”. And once we possess that proof, we must “not add or subtract” imagining again that certain acts are God’s will. Dress styles or facial hair make you no closer to God, and nothing is wrong with shaving or wearing colored garments. Torah is complete, and any attempt to deviate, add or subtract, is a Torah violation.

Don’t try to be more religious than God. ■

Name Calling

Reader: I think I understand why people ask others to read Tehillim when someone is sick; not that I think it makes too much sense - but it has to do with the sick person being the reason for your learning, and therefore they are causing you to be a better person, and so they become better in that way (But why just Tehillim and not any other Torah?...just a side question.)

But how does adding a name to sick person do anything? This I don't understand.

Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim: Perhaps changing one's name is to cause the person to abandon his prior identity (name) and enable him to part with previous sins. As a new person with a new identity, he may more easily abandon sins and change for the better...thereby entitling him to God's intervention.

The Rabbis teach that the ways of repentance include changing one's name. ■

Time is Relative

Reader: I live in Israel. May I visit this web site on Motza'ey Shabbat when it's still Shabbat in NY? I visited sites with halachik Q&A's and I feel that this issue is still unresolved - different rabbis hold different opinions. I'm therefore asking you, since I consider you to be the "Mara de'Atra" here.

Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim: You may certainly visit our website once Shabbos has concluded for you, even though it remains Shabbos where the website is located. The reason being, that no one is performing work on Shabbos: we are not performing work, since no prohibition exists to keep our website active over Shabbos, like a light switched on Friday; and you have no Shabbos any longer, so no violation can exist for you. And if you ask that your action is now affecting a Shabbos-bound time zone, the answer is that your time zone is all that matters. Similarly, if I stand in a location where Shabbos concluded, and I throw a ball into a time zone where Shabbos has not concluded, since my Shabbos is over, there is no violation. Furthermore, I am perplexed why some Rabbis prohibit this. Please explain their views. Thank you. ■

MAIMONIDES

13 PRINCIPLES

Judaism's Fundamentals

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.

(continued on next page)

(Fundamentals continued from previous page)

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"



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 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 Mitzraim, and his wife was Mehatbe'el" and "Timnah was his concubine" and "I am Hashem your God" and "Hear Israel [Hashem

(continued on next page)

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 Amorrhah 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.

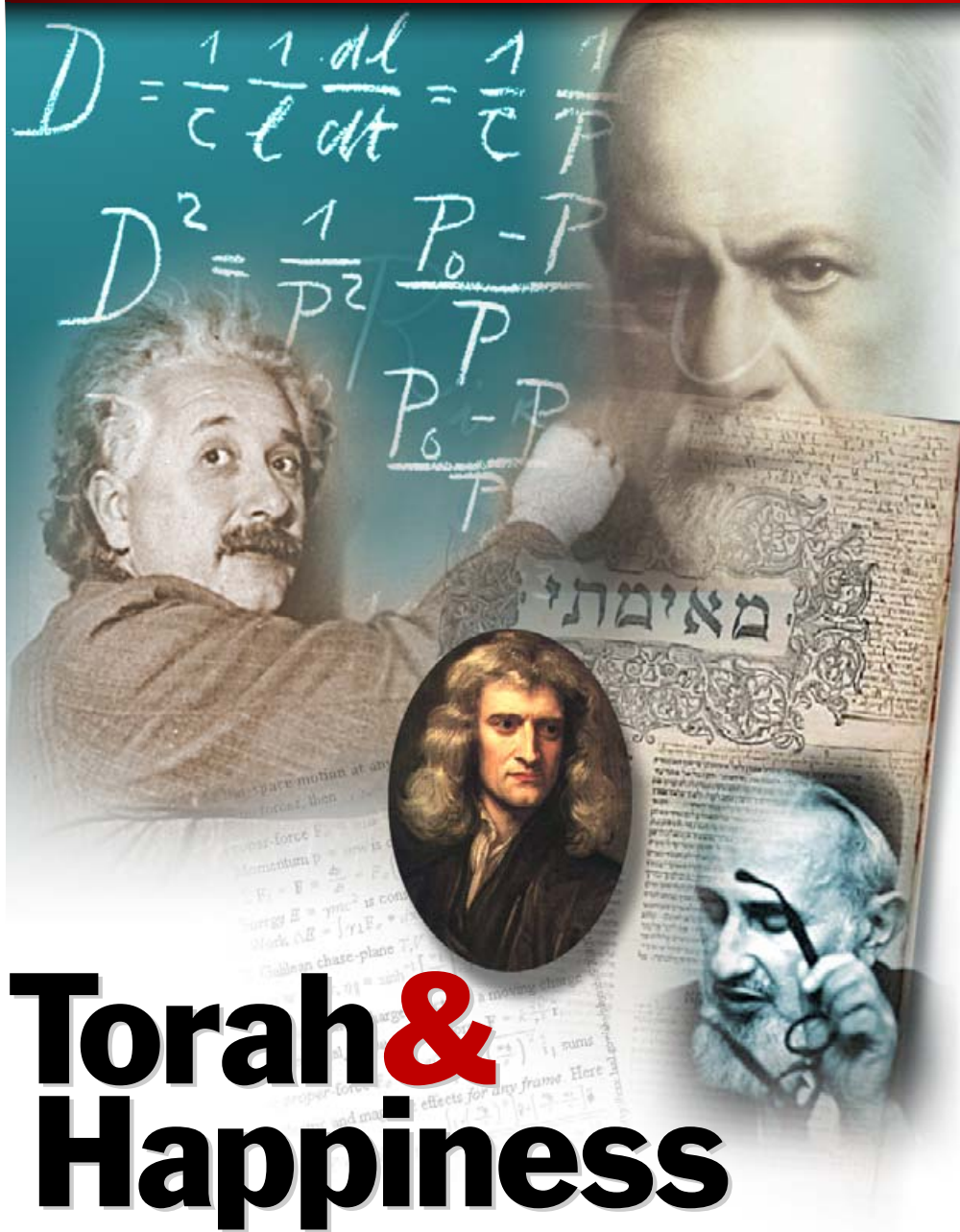
Principle XIII. Resurrection of the dead

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]. ■





Torah & Happiness

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

Periodically, we experience negative feelings. We might possess sufficient wealth, family, friends, and health, but emotions of dissatisfaction, greed, jealousy, and arrogance ruin what could be a more even keeled life. We verbalize and act out what we should not, and then have to pay the price by losing a job, a friend, our reputation, or a spouse.

For others, unfortunately, we succumb to feelings of inferiority, persecution, and inadequacy, and allow our burdens, low self-esteem and letdowns to overcome us. They soon become our daily focus, casting a cloud over our every move. We then accept a dreary "fate", mumbling "Why me?" but never attempt to

overcome our troubles. However, problems can be overcome. With time, we can identify how we "got here", and learn how we can remove our problems. But accept this: there are obstacles on the path to recovery – many self imposed – which we must recognize, and from which, we must not cower or avoid. And it is these very obstacles that caused our predicaments to begin with. However, a source of strength to help us overcome our current state is the desire to be happy. If we retain our hope, and follow a rational path, although it may take some time, we can arrive at a better life where we are truly, deeply happy.

Many individuals rose from poverty, sickness

and depression, to wealth, health and happiness. But to do so, reflection was required, so as to identify the cause of their problems. Sometimes, people wish sympathy from others and avoid the removal of their problems, as they would no longer receive that "desired" sympathy. At times, sympathy is our unconscious desire, one that we readily deny. Other times, we might remain with problems because we have not matured to complete independence as we should, and we seek the "parental" care of others to compensate for early years when we were not given that much needed attention. Therefore, we unconsciously desire to remain in poor conditions, so as to generate the missed attention of that parent, now embodied in a replacement figure. If friends or authorities inform us of such unconscious wishes, we might immediately deny such explanations. But any "immediate" denial must be recognized as an ego defense mechanism: another emotion that regularly seeks to secure our dignity. However, we cannot let dignity blind us to the truth about our personalities and destructive drives. Understanding what makes each one of us tick, most times, requires the counsel of a wise, objective individual, and the ability to accept a less-than-desired self-image. For this reason, when one is very sick, the Talmud suggests a visit to a wise man. He is best suited to examine our lives and values, directing us to the sin or error causing God's removal from our lives, and this illness. It is then up to us to be truthful, accepting what we see as accurate, addressing our shortcomings. We should also view such information as a blessing.

The "unconscious" part of our mind is responsible for our dreams, and many actions and feelings throughout the day. Our unconscious is not something about which to feel poorly or embarrassed, for the greatest people have an unconscious. But its workings deserve examination, so it no longer dictates our moves. By understanding ourselves, and accepting whatever feelings we might have, we can then realize these emotions in action, becoming conscious of their workings, and consciously deciding not to repeat destructive actions, no matter how comfortable or usual they have become. Focusing on the repeated harm our unexamined lives caused us, coupled with a real yearning to become happier, we can do just that.

The truth of this unconscious is readily seen in individuals who have experienced trauma. Take for example a person with extreme shyness. Why is this person more shy than most? At times we might attribute it to familial personality traits, but at times, it is due to some event in childhood. Just as a hand becomes callused when working

(continued on next page)

The masses never studied who is happy and who is not. And if the media is correct, then why do those rich and famous people keep getting divorced, become alcoholics, and lose their lives to drugs? Why are they not happy? Conversely, why are Rabbis, Torah students, scientists and philosophers for centuries, completely engrossed and invigorated when studying God's universe and laws?

with rough materials, so too the human mind or rather, the psyche, reacts to events and feelings, and can remain altered for decades. The more impressionable the psyche or the younger the child at trauma, the more affected is the individual.

One way to undo such affects, is gaining knowledge of the self, not allowing ego to deny what might be true, and to work with this new information. Eventually, if we remain focused and optimistic on the real prospect that we can arrive at a happy life, and we dislike our current situation more than the "ugly" truths we might have to face about ourselves...we should be encouraged, and start down the path to recovery immediately. Find a reputable, wise individual, pay him or her whatever the costs, and learn about yourself. This can be a Rabbi, a psychologist, or a friend with a keen sense of psychology and human nature. But accept that this might take some time.

But this is only one method for arriving at happiness, regardless of our current predicament.

Torah and Happiness

You must also be encouraged that God certainly wishes the best life for each of us, and that your very existence is God's will. Think about that last line for a moment: you exist, only because you were created. And it is God who created you. You are a result of the will of the Creator of the universe. As He wishes the cosmos to stretch forever, He desired your existence. How does that make you feel, that God actually desires you to exist? This must engender in you a feeling of appreciation that you have been given this opportunity of "life". We cannot always control events that affect us, but we can respond with reason, and we must also know that God has no obstacles if He wishes to assist you. God fully understands the spectrum of sadness through happiness, and that we all experience a myriad of emotional highs and lows throughout our life. And as God created us all, He wishes that we live for a reason: to experience a happy existence. God's creation of the full range of emotions, coupled with His gift of the Torah, teaches us that living in accord with Torah, we may find a more primary path towards happiness, even if we are currently in a state of turmoil. The error that many people make is that they don't observe this truth discussed in the Talmud, that God wishes man's happiness and gave Torah as the solution. They live life as if they know what brings happiness; yet, time after time, we see this is false. Most of us feel "I am trying to be happy". But we only 'assume' how happiness is achieved,

and have not determined if our assumptions are valid. But as God created one Torah for all mankind, this means that it is the exclusive path for everyone to achieve happiness. It is therefore the best remedy for every life. This in no way is to minimize personal suffering, but God's lesson is this: life is not truly enjoyed, if Torah is avoided.

Working on removing our own obstacles, be they great or small, is a must. But this alone does not give us happiness. We are "designed" creatures, which means we have a precise method of operation: there are limitations to our physical abilities, and ways in which we work best. As food is essential for the happiness of our bodies, our more central component, our souls, also require nourishment. If we starve our bodies, we die, and if we starve our soul our soul dies. But this is not something most people accept. Most people 'assume' if they obtain what society and the media portray is happiness, then they will arrive at happiness. But you must realize that the masses never studied who is happy and who is not. And if the media is correct, then why do those rich and famous people keep getting divorced, become alcoholics, and lose their lives to drugs? Why are they not happy? Conversely, why are Rabbis, Torah students, scientists and philosophers for centuries, completely engrossed and invigorated when studying God's universe and laws? Evidently there is more to life than possessions. The life if wisdom has proven to address all personalities, affording all involved with great fulfillment.

We start each day with the Modeh Ani: "Thankful am I before You, King, the living and eternal God, that You returned my soul to me with mercy, great is Your trust". These are the very first words we are to recite each morning when waking upon our beds. This sentiment, if recited with meaning, can have the most profound effect on the remainder of our day. We rise with the knowledge that God wishes our existence for yet another day. What are we to do with this existence? How can I truly "be happy?"

If we are to truly be happy, then simultaneously with our identifying, confronting and abandoning negative feelings and destructive behaviors, we must determine in which activities we are to engage. Becoming psychologically healthy and at ease is essential, but it is not an ends, and cannot create happiness itself. The human being possesses much energy and much ambition, and if we stifle this ambition and energy, we become frustrated. We are fortunate that God has taught us the precise activities, which will lead to happiness: the Torah laws.

Having created us, no one knows better than God what will offer us the most fulfilling life. ■

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