

What should be our view of the World to Come?

Read Maimonides' "Laws of Repentance", chapters 9 & 10

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Weekly Parsha

Kedoshim

RABBI BERNARD FOX

"And when you reap the harvest of your land do not completely harvest the ends of your field. And do not collect the individual stalks that have fallen. And do not completely pick the grapes of your vineyard. They must be left to the poor person and the convert. I am Hashem your G-d." (VaYikra 19:9-10)

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the World to Come



RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

In our society, and day and age, one rarely contemplates leaving this Earth; we are immersed in a sea of earth-bound attractions. King Solomon remarked, "Also the world He has placed in their hearts" (Ecclesiastes) referring to immortality. God placed a feeling of immortality in our makeup, for otherwise, we would be morbid, and we would not live with enthusiasm as He wishes.

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Weekly Parsha

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According to Maimonides, the two passages above are the source for six commandments. First, the passages are the source for the positive and negative commandments regarding Pe'ah. When we harvest a field we are not permitted to completely harvest the grain of the field. Instead, we are required to leave a portion for the needy. The requirement to leave this portion – the Pe'ah – is a positive command.[1] The prohibition against completely harvesting the field – and not leaving Pe'ah is a negative command.[2] Second, we are commanded leave Leket. When the grain is reaped, some stalks naturally fall to the ground. We are required to leave these individual stalks for the needy. The requirement to leave these stalks – the Leket – is a positive commandment.[3] The prohibition against collecting the Leket is a negative commandment.[4] Third, when we collect the grapes of a vineyard, we are required to leave a portion for the needy. The requirement to leave this portion is a positive commandment.[5] The prohibition against completely collecting the grapes of the vineyard is a negative commandment.[6] In other words, the passages outline three requirements. We are required to leave standing a portion of the grain in the field. We must leave any individual stalks that fall to the ground. We must leave a portion of the grapes on the vines. Each of the requirements is expressed as a positive commandment and a negative commandment. This results in a total of six commandments.

Sefer HaChinuch explains that these mitzvot apply in the land of Israel on a Torah level. The Sages extended these commandments to apply outside of Israel.[7]

The mishne explains that the Torah did not establish a standard for the mitzvah of Pe'ah. We are not required to leave a specific amount of grain standing or a set percentage of the field's produce for the needy. Instead, on the Torah level, the requirement of Pe'ah can be fulfilled by leaving any small amount of grain.[8] However, the mishne adds that the Sages did establish a set requirement. One 60th of the field's grain must be left standing. The mishne continues to explain that this standard of one 60th is a minimum. Under some circumstances a larger percentage must be left. Two of the factors that affect the required percentage are the number of poor people requiring support and the size of the field.[9]

The first factor is readily understood. The requirement to leave a minimum of one sixtieth of the gain for the poor assumes that this amount will provide a meaningful resource for the poor people of the area. However, if there are an unusually large number of poor people in the area, then one 60th of the field's grain will not provide these poor

people with a meaningful level of assistance. Under such circumstances, we are required to leave more than the minimum one 60th of the grain for the poor.[10]

However, the second circumstance noted by the mishne is not completely clear. The mishne explains that the amount of grain in the field is also affected by the size of the field. According to Maimonides, the mishne is referring to a small field. In a small field, it is not adequate to leave one 60th of the grain for the needy: some amount more than one 60th must be left standing. Rabbaynu Ovadia Bertinoro argues that the mishne means that in a large field more than one 60th must be left standing.[11] It is true that the wording of the mishne is ambiguous. But it is strange that these two authorities came to exactly opposite conclusions regarding the mishne's meaning. What is the basis for this dispute?

In order to understand this unusual dispute, it is important to begin with a more fundamental issue. As explained above, on a Torah level there is no established minimum for Pe'ah. A person can discharge this obligation by leaving a single stalk standing. This seems strange. Maimonides includes his discussion of Pe'ah in the section of his code – the Mishne Torah – that deals with charity for the poor. Most forms of charity have more clear and substantial standards. For example, we are required on selected years to give a tithe to the poor from the harvest. The amount of this tithe is one tenth of the harvest.[12] The mitzvah of charity also has a standard. We are required to provide the poor with meaningful support.[13] It is odd that the mitzvah of Pe'ah lacks any similar standard on the Torah level. No specific percentage is required and the amount of grain need not provide meaningful support.

This question can be answered on two levels. First, the question can be addressed on a strictly halachic level. An analysis of the passages above provides an important insight into the formulation of the requirement of Pe'ah. The passages begin with a statement of the negative commandment regarding Pe'ah. The Torah tells us, "And when you reap the harvest of your land do not completely harvest the ends of your field." The Torah commands us to not completely harvest the grain of the field. This requirement is met by leaving any portion of the grain standing. The positive commandment to leave Pe'ah is based on and reflects the structure of this negative commandment. Just as the negative commandment merely requires that we do not completely harvest the grain, so too, the positive commandment requires that we leave some portion of the grain standing. However, on a deeper level it is appropriate to consider the objective of this formulation.

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Weekly Parsha



As mentioned above, Maimonides treats the mitzvah of Pe'ah as one of the mitzvot requiring that we support the needy. Why are we required to care for those who are less fortunate? We generally assume that this requirement is based on an ethic of social justice. In other words, the Torah's ethic of social justice demands that the more fortunate have compassion for and provide assistance to the less fortunate members of society. However, Sefer HaChinuch in his treatment of the mitzvah of Pe'ah does not describe the mitzvah's objective as social justice. Instead, he stresses the impact of the mitzvah on the owner of the field. Apparently, according to Sefer HaChinuch, the fundamental purpose of the mitzvah – on a Torah level – is not to provide support for the poor. The fundamental objective of the mitzvah is expressed in its impact on the owner of the field. Apparently, the mitzvah is designed to discourage greed. The miserly person cannot imagine leaving any portion of the grain in his field standing. The Torah discourages this miserly attitude by requiring that the owner of the field train himself to not be greedy. Some portion must be left standing.

Sefer HaChinuch's interpretation of the mitzvah of Pe'ah is reflected by another requirement outlined in these passages. The requirement of Leket is that we leave for the poor any individual stalks that fall to the ground during the harvest. Clearly, Leket is directed against greed. Leket instructs us to not be so greedy as to pick up every stray stalk that has slipped from our grasp.

Sefer HaChinuch adds that the mitzvah of Pe'ah

helps a person achieve happiness. A person who is greedy is never satisfied with his portion. He never has enough. Because of his greed he is unsatisfied with his financial successes and is constantly driven to amass more wealth. But because of his basic disposition of greed, new additional wealth does not satisfy him and he remains as unsatisfied as he was before he added to his fortune.[14]

According to Sefer HaChinuch it makes perfect sense that the Torah did not establish a minimum standard for Pe'ah. A minimum standard would be misleading. It might mislead us to conclude that the mitzvah is designed primarily to aid the poor. However by omitting a minimum standard for Pe'ah, the Torah indicates that the purpose of the mitzvah is not only to assist the poor. The purpose is also to assist the owner of the field become a healthier and more fulfilled individual.

One can also conclude from the Torah's formulation of the requirement of Pe'ah that poverty is not merely a result of the misfortune of the poor. It is also a result of the greed of the more fortunate. The Torah does not provide a standard for Pe'ah. Instead, it directs the field owner to not be greedy. The implication is that if we can overcome our greed, there will be adequate resources to care for ourselves and the less fortunate.

Based on this analysis, it is possible to explain the dispute between Maimonides and Rabbaynu Ovadia Bertinoro. Both agree that the Sages established one 60th as a minimum standard for Pe'ah and that if there are numerous poor people, then a greater portion of the grain must be left

standing. They agree that this greater portion is required in order to provide the numerous poor people with a meaningful level of support. It is apparent that although the primary objective of the mitzvah of Pe'ah may be to counter greed, the Sages placed stress on the objective of supporting the poor.

According to Maimonides, this second objective – supporting the poor – is also reflected in the requirement to adjust the required Pe'ah in accordance with the size of the field. If the field is small and one 60th of its produce will not provide meaningful support, then a greater portion of the grain must be left standing. However, according to Rabbaynu Ovadia Bertinoro, the requirement to adjust the required Pe'ah for the size of the field reflects the primary objective of the mitzvah – to discourage greed. He maintains that if the field is large, then more than one 60th of the grain must be left standing. In other words, the Sages required that a minimum of one 60th of the grain must be left standing. A token amount is not adequate. The owner must leave a portion of the gain standing that will be significant to him. In a typical field, one 60th is a significant amount. The owner will be impacted. However in a large field, leaving one 60th of the grain may not have a significant impact on the owner. Therefore, in the larger field a greater portion must be left standing. ■

[1] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Sefer HaMitzvot, Mitzvat Aseh 120.

[2] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Sefer HaMitzvot, Mitzvat Lo Ta'aseh 210.

[3] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Sefer HaMitzvot, Mitzvat Aseh 121.

[4] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Sefer HaMitzvot, Mitzvat Lo Ta'aseh 211.

[5] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Sefer HaMitzvot, Mitzvat Aseh 123.

[6] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Sefer HaMitzvot, Mitzvat Lo Ta'aseh 212.

[7] Sefer HaChinuch, Mitzvah 216.

[8] Mesechet Pe'ah 1:1.

[9] Mesechet Pe'ah 1:2.

[10] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Mishne Torah, Hilchot Matnot Aniyim 1:15.

[11] Rabbaynu Ovadia Bertinoro, Commentary on the Mishne, Mesechet Pe'ah 1:2.

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

[13] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Mishne Torah, Hilchot Matnot Aniyim 7:1.

[14] Sefer HaChinuch, Mitzvah 216.

(World to Come continued from page 1)

Fundamentals

Humans require a sense of permanence in order to strive towards goals and happiness. Furthermore, the here and now is all we ever knew, and we cannot fathom some other existence. So we become attached to this world: buying stocks, more than taking stock in ourselves. However, based on one other consideration, we should reverse our priorities: we die.

The Torah is not devoid of addressing the major part of our existence: the afterlife. But since one's afterlife can only exist if he or she came to a true love of wisdom while alive, the Torah does not focus on the afterlife, for that would distract us from studying wisdom for its own sake, "Torah Lishmah". Therefore, in this life, we must "minimize our work and maximize our learning" (Ethics) if we are to truly arrive at a deep understanding and love for wisdom, Torah...and primarily love for God. It follows that a true appreciation for the World to Come, can only be experienced by those of us who truly love wisdom, for the next, immaterial world is bereft of any physical attractions. So, we cannot remain ignorant of the afterlife, and matters concerning it, but we must not focus on it as an end: we desire it as a pristine, continuation of our engagement in Torah. Maimonides explains (Laws of Repentance; 9:2) that all of Israel, their prophets and their wise men anticipated the Messianic era, for at that time, we will be greatly engaged in Torah study, thereby meriting the World to Come.

Our society blinds us with distortions and emotional lures, and can easily remove us from our ultimate existence. It is therefore crucial that we renew our focus on the greatest mitzvah of Torah study. Let us do so now, simultaneously addressing this topic.

We do not often find a Mishna (unit of Oral Law) addressing pure philosophy. Usually, a Mishna elaborates on specific requirements of Halachik practice: "How does one violate carrying on the Sabbath?" So we take a little more time reading a Mishna that offers philosophic counsel regarding the next world. The Mishna teaches us the following (Kiddushin, 39b): "[For] anyone who performs one mitzvah, good is performed for him, his life is prolonged, and he will inherit the World to Come". The Talmud then asks how this can be, since another Mishna (Payah, 1:1) states, "These are the matters that man eats the fruits in this world, but the principle awaits him in the World to Come, and these are they: honoring parents, acts of kindness, hosting guests, generating peace among friends, and Torah study outweighs them all." The Talmud suggests that "these" five are what earn man his portion in the World to Come...and not as the Mishna in Kiddushin



states. So which is it?

The Talmud resolves the seeming contradiction: the Mishna in Kiddushin in fact means, that whoever does one mitzvah "more" than his sins, will retain his portion in the World to Come. Meaning, if a person performed 50 sins and 51 mitzvahs (performing a majority of mitzvahs) then, "good is performed for him, his life is prolonged, and he will inherit the World to Come". The Mishna in Payah teaches a different lesson: if one has performed 50 sins and 50 mitzvahs, (lacking a majority of mitzvahs) but one of those mitzvahs is one of these 5 mentioned in Payah...again, he retains his portion in the World to Come. We learn from the two Mishnas that there are two means for retaining our share in the World to Come: 1) performing a majority of mitzvahs, or, 2) having an equal amount of sins and mitzvahs, but within our mitzvahs, we performed one of these 5: an issue of quantity vs. quality. The bottom line is that God judges us based on our strongest leanings. This is fair.

The Mishna in Payah teaches that Torah study is the greatest mitzvah. We should learn Torah based on a love of wisdom, for this is the highest level, and what will lead us to an awe and love of the Creator. Maimonides teaches

that our portion in the next world is proportionate to the "greatness of our actions, and the abundance of our wisdom" (ibid, 9:1). The Mishna and Maimonides are concerned that we do not forfeit our World to Come. Are we as concerned? Sometimes we require an incentive, or a wake-up call, and perhaps this Mishna – understanding man's nature – is addressing the need for a stimulant. But we must not remain Torah-adherent out of fear, as this is not a fitting level as Maimonides also teaches. (ibid, 10:1)

We have only one life. We have promises from God that the more we engage in Torah study and perfection, the more He will ease our burdens, allowing us to devote more time to study.

He created you, myself, and all mankind for this primary reason. That is why of all creation, man alone possesses intelligence. He also created us in a way that Torah study becomes more enjoyable with time, and more amazing. Study may not be easy at first, but do not allow initial frustration to deter you. For it is not studying that is frustrating, but our redirecting of energies from usual, familiar satisfactions that requires emotional adjustment. Study can only bring enjoyment, as God designed us to enjoy wisdom more than any other pursuit. It is foolish if we ignore a doctor, who knows the body best. Similarly, it is foolish to ignore God, who designed us.

And once we gauge our lives based on God's Torah, are we concerned enough to teach others? Teaching too is a command, so we must educate others, be they observant, non-observant, or Gentile.

As we approach the halfway point in our count towards receiving the Torah on Shavuot, let us be cognizant of that which we anticipate: the Torah – a guide for life, and our primary involvement and enjoyment. Be careful to avoid sin, and do mitzvahs, as the Mishna taught, this will secure our World to Come.

Contemplate the fact that you are a created thing...that there is a Creator. Then contemplate that He gave us all His Torah. To enjoy the World to Come, which is bereft of physicality, one must enjoy only that which exists there: wisdom. So study, and you will eventually gravitate towards more interests, you will be enamored with answers, and the cycle will continue your entire life, as you near your next, final existence. As you grow older, you will be more involved in your studies...out of pure, genuine curiosity...like the excited, inquisitive children we used to be.

There is much to be discovered, so be enthused, and anticipate much. Begin your journey, while helping others. ■

the Bigger Lie

Part II

“Apparently So” is Craig Harris’ column which runs in the HERALD-PRESS (Palestine, Texas). Today, a Mesora reader wrote in questioning Mr. Harris’s arguments claiming “solid evidence” for Jesus’ resurrection. In response to our reader, I will quote the author’s arguments, and respond intermittently.

“Craig Harris: Today is Easter Sunday - the day we Christians celebrate the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. But did he really rise again? If he didn’t, then he was a liar — or a madman. If he didn’t rise again, then our faith is useless and there is no life after death. The whole Bible is a lie, in fact, if Jesus didn’t rise again. So, is there any real evidence that the resurrection of Jesus actually happened – or is it just a myth? I want to share some of the solid evidence that Jesus’ resurrection really did happen: First, the reliability of the Scriptures. Did you know that we have more than 25,000 manuscripts of the Greek New Testament? That is a huge amount. Some manuscripts date to within 100 years of the autographs (the original writings) and all agree with each other. (Yes, there are minor differences, but there are so many copies available we can look at them and get a very accurate picture of what the New Testament writers said.) What this means is that the Bible is extremely reliable as a historical document.”

Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim: Would Christians then agree that since the Koran is also widely published, therein claiming responsibility for Jesus’ existence, that such popularity sufficiently validates that claim? Certainly, Christians view the Koran’s words as lies; thereby contradicting their very own argument, that “widespread acceptance” of a story is validation.

In truth, the widespread nature of any “belief” cannot render that belief into “fact”; as we said,

Islam’s claim of responsibility for Jesus is equally widespread. What then is the formula for validating historical claims as 100% truths? It is this: historical claims are validated as absolute truth when in the record itself, masses are recorded as having attended that event. If however with regards to stories as these, masses are not part of the account, then, numbers of manuscripts are irrelevant: for someone merely fabricated an event, and over the years, many others accepted it as fact and republished it. We must also not succumb to the human frailty of accepting “historic works”. The age of a document in no way validates what is written thereon. In 5000 years, an ancient fairy tale about Snow White remains a fiction.

But be clear: mass ‘acceptance’ does not equate to mass ‘attendees’ at the original event. Mass acceptance and proliferation does not validate any historical account as true. It merely teaches us how emotionally appealing the story is, and thus, masses desired to believe it, and proliferate it.

Mass silence is also a matter of which to take note. The Jewish Bible (Torah) does not hide the greatness or purported wonders of our oppressors: the Egyptians and their magicians. We have no history of selective recording; all true histories are equally transmitted in all Jewish Bibles, be they positive or negative. Had Jesus performed any wonders, certainly the people, who supposedly witnessed his feats, would have recorded them. But such unanimous silence – at the very least – should make an honest person question the claims of Jesus’ miracles: why do the Jews have no record? Why were no records in existence until 100s of



years later?

Why do the Gospels contradict one another? Honesty demands that these questions be addressed.

Judaism bases its historical truths on the identical methods used to determine any history: religion is no less subject to validation, than world history. Now, world history is verified by mass attendees at a given account, say for example, Caesar’s rule. Without resorting to artifacts, relying only on the current history texts, we are 100% convinced of Caesar’s existence and rule. The reason is because it would be impossible that the entire world would transmit a similar claim regarding some man being emperor, in a certain region and for a specific duration...had it been lies. Masses have no motive to conspire and fabricate a false history. A few of Jesus’ followers are different, as their love for him propelled them to deify him, a phenomenon seen in many religions. But human nature is such, that masses cannot possess the identical motive,

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(Jesus Resurrected? continued from page 5)

therefore, masses cannot lie about an event, but they can “believe” en masse, as with Hitler’s Big Lie, and in the belief that Jesus saves: these are not “events.” Thus, when a story of such proportions such as Caesar’s reign reaches us today, where masses attest to a set of identical facts, names, places and dates...the story must have transpired. Certainly, if it did not, 1) we would not be in receipt of such a story, and 2) there would be in existence a second, “true” account of that region’s history. But as the story has reached the entire globe, it was transmitted by masses; and as there is no alternative account of that era, we arrive at 100% conviction. But keep in mind, we are addressing “witnessed events” not beliefs, the latter is what Mr. Harris addresses.

Consider the alternative: had Moses and the 600,000 male Jews never witnessed the specific miracles in Egypt and at Sinai, how would we explain the world’s acceptance of these Biblical accounts as truths today? Would it be possible for a Moses, a lone individual, to fabricate such a story, locate masses, convince them all to believe that they all descended from an Abraham? Would these masses accept Moses as a leader, abandon their true history, and then transmit to their children a new history full of Egyptian miracles and travels to Sinai, a mountain ablaze, a voice that made them feel they were dying...all which they never witnessed? It is ludicrous to entertain such a possibility, that if it had not occurred, that a man could convince masses of such lies. Truthfully, these masses would view Moses as insane and evict him from their territories. Moses stories would not survive a single day, let alone 3318 years. It is clear: the Jews transmitted these Biblical accounts en masse only because they did in fact witness these real events and miracles; and they did descend from Abraham. This is why we accept Caesar and Alexander’s rule, the Egyptian Plagues, the Exodus, and God’s revelation at Mount Sinai as absolute truths regardless of artifacts. This is also why we dismiss all New Testament claims: masses of witnesses are absent.

We arrive at our litmus test for verifying historical accounts as truths: masses must have attended the purported events. Conversely, since Greek gods and Jesus’ miracles contain no stories of actual accounts with masses of witnesses, these gods were never accepted in any historical age as “truths”, but rather, as tales; and Christianity was then built on “blind faith”.

“Craig Harris: Second, we have writings of historians outside the Bible that corroborate the stories within it. These historians, like Pliny the Younger, Ptolemy, Tacitus and Josephus, not only mention kings, governors, dates and places found in the Bible, they also mention the disciples and

Jesus himself. Third, the empty tomb. The Gospel writers all mention that the tomb was empty Easter Sunday morning. If there had been a body there, the Romans or Jewish leaders could have shown it and that would have ended Christianity right then and there. Remember, the tomb was well guarded. Also, in the Bible, women saw the empty tomb first — that would never happen in Jewish fiction of that day, so it must have been true.”

Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim: As to this response, we do not debate that a person might have lived at a certain time, if masses at his time are recorded as attesting to this. But we must distinguish between documentation of a man’s existence, and between documentation of “miracles”, which do not exist. This second argument fails to validate Jesus or Christianity as divine, or that any miracle or resurrection transpired.

It is also essential to distinguish between a purported resurrection of Jesus, and the miracles in Egypt and Sinai. Why do we accept the later only? It is because masses witnessed actual “events”...and did not make claims based on “deductions”, as is the case with Jesus’ empty tomb. To claim a “resurrection” occurred because of circumstantial evidence, or actually, lack thereof, the story becomes riddled with questions. Furthermore that “evidence” of a resurrection itself a story written 100s of years after the purported “account”. Any intelligent person would claim such a story validates nothing. But as you will see from Mr. Harris’ final argument, he is not working with methods of reason, but with psychotic delusions.

So be clear: Jesus’ resurrection is arrived at by an unverified story about an empty tomb. In stark contrast, the Torah’s historical accounts are based on, 1) 600,000 men plus an equal number of women and even more children...not few disciples, and 2) actual eyewitnesses of real events, not deductions.

“Craig Harris: Fourth, Paul wrote in First Corinthians that 500 people saw Jesus after his resurrection. Paul wrote this about 20 years after the resurrection and points out that most of them were still alive and could verify what they saw. No one disputes the validity and historicity of Paul or First Corinthians, and 500 people do not have the same hallucination.”

Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim: Paul may have written something, but the absence of those 500 purported witnesses, and also, that it was not written until years “later” is false, for mass silence is not viable.

“Craig Harris: Fifth, why would the early Christians have celebrated Communion and

Baptism if Jesus had remained dead? History teaches that the Christians began celebrating The Lord’s Supper within 20 years of Jesus’ resurrection. Communion commemorates the sacrificial death of Jesus by celebrating the blood he shed and how his body was broken. Why would they do this if Jesus’ death had been meaningless? This would be like a John F. Kennedy fan club celebrating his death instead of his life and legacy. Further, the early Christians changed the meaning of baptism from a Jewish cleansing ritual to mean “buried with Christ and raised to life with him.” (Romans 6:4).

Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim: This claim as well is based on the New Testament accounts, stories with no validations, but mere beliefs.

“Craig Harris: Sixth, why would the disciples die for a lie? We see in the Gospels that they were basically cowards. Why did these timid lambs suddenly change into the lions of the faith? Yes, people die for what they believe is true, but people do not die for what they know is NOT true. History says all of the disciples died for their faith except John.”

Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim: As Mr. Harris says, “Disciples died for their faith”. Think over that statement...they died for something called “faith” which means lacking proof. A person’s act of martyrdom for anything, in no way proves a historical claim. Rather, it simply exposes the emotional level of the martyr, and his ability to overcome his fear of death due to his imagined good. Arab terrorists also imagine 70 virgins await them upon their martyrdom.

“Craig Harris: Seventh, the emergence and growth of the church. The church started with a small rag tag group of mostly poor people who were murdered and persecuted for their belief. Within two hundred years, it conquered Rome. We name our dogs Nero and Caesar and our children John and Paul. Thousands of churches and changed lives stand as a testament to the resurrection.”

Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim: Again Mr. Harris resorts to his argument of “Popularity Proves History” which is false. Popularity merely teaches us the appeal of a notion. And the more popular a notion, the more widespread it becomes. A very popular notion today is this: “Everything happens for a reason.” Yet, this has not been proven: conversely, numerous occasions show the opposite to be true. Nonetheless, masses echo this belief as it caters to some “guiding force” in life, alleviating one’s responsibilities for poor decisions. The same is true with regards to Mr. Harris’ seventh argument. Perhaps we shall also suggest that the Church’s Crusades must be a “good”, since it too

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One Religion

(Jesus cont. from pg. 6)

was widespread, leading us to dangerous opinions about Hitler's widespread machine. Mr. Harris preaches a deadly theology, where the barometer of that which is good and true, is simply how widespread a notion is.

“Craig Harris: Eighth, the conversion of skeptics. Scores of non-believers, including Jesus' own brothers, Paul and atheists, have put their faith in Christ after seeing him alive or examining the evidence.”

Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim: Same as above.

“Craig Harris: Finally, the ongoing encounters with Jesus today. Millions of us throughout history have had a conversion experience. We know Jesus is alive because we have felt, known and experienced him. This is the good news: that God came to earth, redeemed us and can be experienced by us. This Sunday morning, remember, we don't celebrate the good life of a dead man, we celebrate the resurrection of a living Savior who made us, loves us, and wants to know us. Happy Easter from my family to yours.”

Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim: Here, Mr. Harris reveals his deviation from reality, by claiming to have “experienced” a dead man.

It is an important lesson that multiple arguments defending a single position as Mr. Harris presents, imply the failure of each individual argument. For if someone possessed “solid evidence” as Craig Harris claims, he would not need to resort to more than one “solid” proof. However, Mr. Harris has exposed his arguments as invalid on a number of accounts, and then admits to living in a fantasy world, as he claims to have encountered a “dead man”, prohibited by his Bible in Deut. 18:11.

Since he has offered no proof, but in fact exposes Christianity's arguments as false, Craig Harris is correct on one point, “If Jesus didn't rise again, then his faith is useless” ... “the whole New Testament is a lie, in fact, if Jesus didn't rise again.” Mr. Harris should stand behind this opening remark of his, admitting that he has failed to verify the Resurrection. He must now abandon his religion. ■

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Then: 1) register, 2) select “Ask the Rabbi”, and 3) post your feedback or questions under the “Jesus' Resurrection” thread.

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Activism



April 30th was the Washington D.C. Rally for Darfur. Many of us could not attend. Mesora.org in conjunction with Rabbi Reuven Mann of Rinat Yisrael, Plainview, NY have launched this website so Jews and all people of concern may show support by signing our petition to protect the victims. Our numbers, as well as our petition, will be forwarded to the White House, to the UN, members congress and Jewish organizations worldwide. Please visit JewsforDarfur.com and sign on.



The Dangers of Viewing Midrashim Literally

RABBI PINCHAS ROSENTHAL

“And the daughter of Paroh’s arm stretched out many cubits” and the dangers of Midrashim

As part of the interview into high school, I often challenge incoming students with questions that contrast the P’shat of a Chumash story with its Midrashic counterpart. The reaction is always the same- the student looks at me like a deer caught in the headlights of an oncoming truck. The other day, the student was an eager young lady named Leah. I asked her the following question: If you were able to go back in time to the moment when Paroh’s daughter saw baby Moshe in his basket, what would you see? Would you see Paroh’s daughter requesting her maidservant to fetch the basket as the posuk tells us or would you see her arm grow 25 feet long like Mister Fantastic and rope in the basket as the Midrash says?

I felt at that moment as if I had asked Leah to choose between her two parents at a divorce proceeding. She knew that the Torah was an authority and correct and the Midrash was an authority and correct. Her mind was telling her both versions could not be simultane-

ously true! Therefore, she was frozen and unable to respond.

Leah was educated in a yeshiva day school. The vast majority of children from the current Yeshiva system believe all Midrashim are part of the literal account of the events that occurred in the Tanach.

Let me fast forward to an Anthropology Class at Queens College. The professor is discussing ancient Egypt. He mentions there is a legend among the Jews about the daughter of Pharaoh concerning her arm stretching out to retrieve baby Moses. Leah raises her hand. She says that it was a miracle and the daughter of Paroh had her arm stretched out to save Moshe. Suddenly, all 53 members of her class turn to her and stare. Her face turns crimson. The Professor asks her, “Do you believe that actually happened?” Leah feels the temperature rising. She knows that her beliefs are under attack, and that she has been publicly put on the spot. She desperately wants to explain the Torah position in a cogent way and yet she finds that despite 15 years of Yeshiva education, she is unable to do so.

What is the Torah position on Midrashim?

The great philosopher, the Rambam, in his commentary to Perek Chelek (10th Ch. of Sanhedrin) states unequivocally that Midrashim are not to be taken literally, but are a source of deep wisdom. The great Mikubal, the Ramchal, in his Introduction to Aggadah (found in most editions of the Ein Yaakov) states the Midrashim are a source of deep and abstract ideas and not to be taken literally. The Ra’avad on his commentary on the Mishne Torah (Hil. Teshuva ch. 3) states that taking the Midrashim literally “Mishabshos es ha’deos” distorts ones principles of belief. Sadly, this is case with our children. They have been taught midrashim as fairy tales. The effects are disastrous.

I explained to Leah that the Torah’s account is what truly occurred in space and time. The Midrash is there to point to the story behind the story. In my opinion, the seemingly miraculous extension of Paroh’s daughter’s arm is directing us to another idea - the great difficulty that she must have faced saving the life of a Jewish baby. Imagine, if you will, a modern day

Paroh – perhaps a Hitler or a Stalin, or even, a Saddam Hussein. How likely would it be for the daughter of such a singularly evil dictator to defy her father’s murderous intentions? Her actions required her to go against her upbringing and the dictates of her father. This would of necessity create tremendous conflict for any young woman, but particularly for one in her position of prominence in Egyptian society. The Written Torah’s typically spare prose seems to gloss over this conflict. But the Midrash points to it, and if used properly, makes us stop and examine her motivations. The metaphor of her extended arm is an expression of G-d’s directing the actions of Paroh’s daughter. The rabbis are teaching us that her emotional shift towards feeling protective of this baby is as much of a miracle as if G-d had extended her arm 25 feet.

Leah felt as if a load had been removed from shoulders. At age 14, she was taught for the first time, the relationship between the Torah and the Midrashim. It is my belief that all teachers should only teach a Midrash if they help the students discover its deeper message.

Rabbi Simcha Feuerman, LCSW and Chaya Feuerman, LCSW in their article “Teaching Midrashim to Children” suggest using the notion of seeking a “moral of the story” for presenting the idea of a deeper meaning to Midrashim to children. Here is a good example.

“Consider the Midrash which contains a strange twist to the plague of Frogs.

The verse (Shemos 8:2) states: “And the frog went up and covered all of Egypt.” The text uses the singular form when referring to the frogs. Of course, the simple explanation (poshut peshat) is that in Hebrew as in many languages, an entire group or species is labeled in the singular form. However, the Midrash derives from this choice of words that actually one frog rose out of the Nile. However, each and every time an Egyptian tried to hit the frog, instead of it being squashed and killed, it split into several new frogs. Thus, as the frogs began to jump all over, and Egyptians encountered and hit them, the plague grew worse and worse. (See Rashi, Op. Cit.)

To our thinking, there is no question that any classroom of children who were encouraged to ponder what they real lesson behind this Midrash is, would draw powerful insights into the nature of problems and how people get further into them. The inescapable lesson of this Midrash is that when you try to stubbornly and pig-headedly fight a problem, as the Egyptians did, instead of thinking about what has gone wrong you will end up panicking and making things far worse. The more the Egyptians fought the frogs, the worse it got. Who among us in life has not panicked and made a situation far worse instead of staying calm and using problem-solving skills?”

As our children enter the 21st century and its scientific mindset it is obligatory for all educators to ensure that our children see the Torah in its most sophisticated light. ■

Yom
Haazmaut
5766

Dancing with Both Feet on the Ground

RABBI DANIEL MYERS



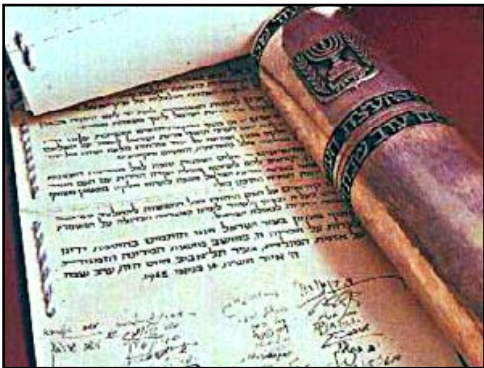
A colleague recently asked me if I would be joyously celebrating Yom Haazmaut this year, considering the recent tragedies. I responded that the festivities would be a bit subdued, in line with the concept of "Emo Anochi B' zarah," feeling the evacuees' pain, but otherwise I would be quite happy on the State's birthday, even more than previous years! In response to his perplexed look, I offered a Mashal, an example: When a young couple is first engaged, they are often in a constant state of bliss, laughing and giggling over just about everything. As far as they are concerned, life together is beautiful and will forever remain that way. If one points out to them that there are various issues that they may need to seriously consider in order to insure a happy and successful marriage, such as finances, child rearing, conflicting personality traits and values, etc. the young couple may simply brush off the advice, quite confident that these may be issues of concern for other couples, but not for them, whose love will naturally get stronger, deeper and more passionate with each passing day. Often, months later, after the 'honeymoon' is over, the couple may not be flying so high; the passion and excitement have waned to a degree, and the naïve optimism may have been jarred by a harsh reality. If the couple is wise, communicative and determined, they will not only endure the difficult transition, tackling life's challenges together, but they will be blessed for their efforts; their relationship will be more genuine and real, and they will have the opportunity to become true soul-mates, loving and caring for each other in a manner which was heretofore inaccessible to them.

This evolution applies to our relationship to the

Medina as well. During our courtship and honeymoon with her, when we first brought the land to life a century ago, then miraculously gained independence with our fledgling army against the mechanized Arab armies in 1948, and finally expanded beyond anyone's dreams in 1967, we were a starry-eyed nation, typified by that beautiful image embedded in our minds of the paratroopers staring at the Kotel in complete awe and disbelief moments after they captured it. This romance-despite hostility from without and wrangling from within—lasted for quite a while; we were soaring for a good few decades, convinced we were on a wonderful path and heading in the right direction! However, recently, our world came tumbling down; abruptly and ruthlessly striking at some of our most cherished dreams and hopes; our eyes became filled with tears instead of stars.

We have now seen quite clearly that there are formidable challenges facing us from without as well as from within. We were always aware of the former ones, but we may not have fully understood or accepted the magnitude of the latter challenges; the sad truth is that, in many ways, we are a divided nation, and we must now come to grips with this bitter reality and courageously respond to it. Nevertheless, despite the agonizing pain, anger and mistrust, we will resiliently adapt to this new stage in our relationship, recognizing that, like young newlyweds, we must evolve from a dreamy courtship to a more real, sober and genuine relationship.

We will continue to rejoice, celebrate and sing, but we will now be privileged to dance with both feet on the ground! Yom Haazmaut Samaich! ■



Letters



Letters

from our

READERS



Letters

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“The only poor question is the one not asked.”

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Darfur

Reader: Regarding your recent launch of JewsForDarfur.com, Darfur is a sad state of ongoing genocide, which is prohibited by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights that was championed by Eleanor Roosevelt.

Kofi Anon and the UN have done very little.

Money sent to Darfur by the U.S. would be diverted by the corrupt officials in Africa who would be asked to help these people.

We would be criticized if we sent troops as peace keepers or peace makers. So should we send contractors? We tried to help in Somalia and received a licking from the local suicide car bombers.

Somalis rejected our help.

There is no oil in Darfur. The locals have been fighting for centuries. There is no reason for us to interfere. We are not the world's policemen.

Rabbi Reuven Mann: You raise some very good points. The complexities involved in seeking to resolve the tragic situation in Darfur are indeed daunting. One should be cognizant of the problems and realistic about the possibilities. However, this should not result in a sense of despair or hopelessness.

There is a danger of focusing exclusively on the negatives and using them to justify a defeatist attitude. There is much good that can be done, many lives that can be saved, if there is a spirit of hope and determination fueled by our love of God and of His creatures. Indeed, we realize our limitation and acknowledge that Divine assistance is needed in order to fulfill our mission.

We believe that when we act in accordance with the Torah's teachings and when our deeds and motives find favor in His sight, then He will help to bring our efforts to fruition. As the verse states, “And David was wise in all his doings, and God was with him.” ■

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