



"...those who fashion evil into a way of life....God turned upon them their own violence, and with their own evil He will cut them off,...God will cut them off."

King David: Psalm 94

ESTD
1997

JewishTimes

*Dedicated to Scriptural and Rabbinic Verification
of Jewish Beliefs and Practices*

Volume I, No. 22...July 4, 2002

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Singing Scriptural Verses

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

The Rabbis in Talmud Sanhedrin, 101a, described the singing of Written Torah verses an evil:

"One who reads a verse of "Song of Songs" and makes it into a (personal) melody, or one who reads a verse at a party not in its time, he brings evil to the world. Because the Torah garbed itself in sackcloth and stood before God and said, 'your children have made me like a harp that is sung to by scorners.' God responded, 'My daughter (the Torah) what should the Jews involve themselves in when they eat and drink?'"

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MSNBC is not "Making Sense"

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

It's just another afternoon...Arafat's twisted mind calmly decides to hire more terrorists to assemble another dozen deadly bombs. Where will they strike tomorrow with their rat-poisoned nails? At unsuspecting shoppers in some Israeli mall? Or perhaps, a school bus stop in some remote, unguarded town. With such force, these bombs and projectiles rip the human body apart like paper, infecting us, if it doesn't kill us. Israeli and American civilians and children now face life without limbs, the inability to walk, and permanent disfigurement. One cannot start to imagine facing such a tragic reality. Our worst nightmares could not paint such horror. Israelis must face a new life, if only they heal physically, and psychologically. To protect the innocent, Israel continues to defend itself against Arafat's militant, homicide bombers.

New evidence surfaces - satisfying President Bush - that Arafat again financed terrorists with a \$20,000 payment. Bush says Israel has a right to self defense against terrorists. Bush makes no moral equation.

Both Powell and Condoleezza Rice, the president's national security adviser, said the United States will not deal with Arafat. They too condemn Arafat's terror.

I just read that MSNBC canceled Alan Keyes. MSNBC's reasoning? Keyes' ratings were not satisfactory. This claim contradicts MSNBC's own reports: WorldNetDaily.com, June 27th, entitled "Keyes' Ratings Better Than Replacement" accurately notes, "The report dated May 27, just one month ago, touts Keyes' quick growth since January: 'Alan Keyes jumps 21 percent over [the first quarter of 2002] - more than competing news networks in the time period.'"

Keyes' show held strong support and

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Palestinians burning the American and Israeli flags. MSNBC fired Alan Keyes, but they hired Jeff Cohen to produce Donahue. Jeff Cohen is founder of FAIR, and is pro-Palestinian.

**MSNBC GIVES VOICE TO COHEN WHO WISHES TO BE LESS HARSH
WITH THOSE WHO WOULD KILL YOUR KIDS. BOYCOTT MSNBC.**

Teach your children that certain people must be dealt with harshly. Now is that time.
Have your children email us with their questions: questions@mesora.org

Mohammed the False Prophet Islam the False Religion

RIVKA OLENICK

"A prophet will the Lord, thy God raise unto thee, a prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren." Deuteronomy 18:15

The false prophet, the navi sheker, the "madman" Mohammed, as the Rambam calls him, convinced his followers of Islam that there are several verses in our scriptures that allude to his being a prophet. The Rambam states: "These arguments have been rehearsed so often that they have become nauseating. It is not enough to declare that they are altogether feeble; to cite as proofs these verses is ridiculous and absurd in the extreme. Neither the untutored multitude nor the apostates themselves who delude others with them believe in them or entertain any illusion about them. Their purpose in citing these verses is to win favor in the eyes of the Gentiles by demonstrating that they believe the statement of the Koran that Mohammed was mentioned in the Torah. The Muslims themselves put no faith in their arguments, they neither accept nor cite them, because they are manifestly so fallacious."

Mohammed claimed that Deuteronomy 18:15 specifically refers to him. He said that it was he who God arose as "a prophet from the midst of thee." Of course, he himself nor anyone else ever found one word in the scriptures that proved that Mohammed arose as a prophet. Yet, he and his blind followers accuse us of manipulating the text of the Torah. They ignorantly claim that we purposely removed every trace of the name of Mohammed from it. However it was they that would not accept the main precepts of the Torah, out of defiance to the Revelation at Sinai. So in great desperation they created a book that horrendously warps and taints our scriptures and undermines Moses as the greatest Prophet. After all this they attempted to legitimize the Koran as a book of truth. Isn't it amazing that exactly what they accuse us of: "altering" the Torah text is exactly what they altered when they made up this "imitation" and called it the Koran. What they believe is so obviously false, yet the world is convinced that this is a book of truth only because of the vast numbers who read it, not because it contains any real truth as Judaism maintains.

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Singing Scriptural Verses

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

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The Torah responded, 'If they are masters of written texts, let them engage in the Five Books, the Prophets and the Writings.....If they are masters of Oral law, let them engage in Oral Law, edicts and stories.....if they are masters of Talmud, let them engage in the laws of Passover at its time, Shavuot at its time and Succos at its time.' Rabbi Shimon son of Elazar said in the name of Rabbi Shimon son of Chananya, 'One who reads a verse in its proper time brings good to the world, as (King Solomon) said, 'A word (davar) in its time, how good (it is).''

This Talmud quote may be surprising due to the overwhelming popularity of this violation today. Concerts, records and many forms of commercially available recorded music sung to verses of the Torah can be found everywhere, and in a majority of religious, Jewish homes. Again we find that masses following their neighbors blindly leads everyone to believe that numbers makes right. But there is no validation through ignorant masses. Conversely, we must follow what the Torah prescribes, not what people do, and we find the Talmud quite clear on this topic.

Let us keep perspective on this sensitive topic, and analyze these words of the Rabbis, the brilliant and devoted Torah scholars who explained the Torah according to God's Will. As we see all of the greats, Rambam, Ramban, Ibn Ezra and countless others quoting the Rabbis of the Talmud, let our estimation of the Rabbis be no less great than theirs.

What are the questions on this section of Talmud?

1) What is the "evil" brought to the world by singing verses? What does it stem from in man?

2) What is God's argument in defense of the Jews? How can God defend the Jews if the gemara holds that it is an evil?

3) Why is the Torah the one responding, and not God Himself? Doesn't he have the answer?

4) What does the metaphor of mourning indicate?

Let us understand the evil involved in singing verses. It is clear that singing is not God's desired purpose for Scripture, not even if the verse is from Song of Songs, an area which shares music's poetic style. What is God's purpose for Scripture? Most definitely, it is for man to ponder and understand of the enclosed concepts, and to imbue man with awe

and appreciation of his Creator.

Verses serve to communicate to man, God's true ideals. Verses were written cryptically so that man digs for those concepts through careful analysis of the texts and their nuances, sharpening his mind even further as he investigates. As King Solomon stated, "If you dig for it like silver, and search it out like a buried treasure, then you will understand the fear of G-d, and the knowledge of G-d will you find" (Proverbs, 2:4-5). Not only does this verse teach that knowledge can be found only after effort, but that knowledge is found only if one engages in the study of Torah - the one Divinely written set of books formulated to sharpen one's intellect as one studies. No other writings can make this claim.

To take a verse and match it to a melody - which serves only to appeal to some emotion - is the farthest thing from God's plan for the Torah system. This explains why the Torah sits in sackcloth. It is mourning the loss of its true counterpart - i.e., man's intellect. It is replaced by man's emotional drive for sensual appeal. The Torah mourns the absence of intelligent man, and complains to God that she is made into a musical instrument sung to by scorners, not studied by philosophers. This is the evil. Man following his instincts, not his intelligence. This is truly a sorrowful state of affairs for man.

Do not be fooled into thinking that singing verses is a religious experience, since the words are from the Torah. Judaism's "religious experiences" are limited in number, as outlined in our 613 commands - one of those commands being "do not add to the Torah's laws." There is absolutely no comparison between one who sings a verse, and one who studies it. As well, be not impressed with the supposed reputation of those you may find singing Torah verses. For the gemara was written by highly perfected individuals - Rabbis of far greater caliber than our present day co-religionists. Today, many succumb to emotional whims, living by notions offering the greatest appeal. Do not be swayed by the wave of Jews who would scorn this gemara. The Rabbis themselves who wrote this Talmudic portion witnessed that the Torah was not used for learning, even back then. This precisely is their message. Think about your own ways and consider the possibility that even masses can go off the path of Torah. It happened numerous times to the Jews who witnessed the splitting of the Red Sea. They were prophets - more perfected than we. So we most certainly err. Jews are erring here, the gemara is right. Give thought to the Rabbis' words before you dismiss them so as to be right only in your eyes.

The evil brought into the world therefore is due to the absence of man's pursuit of intelligent life - now replaced by the emotional drive to satiate the senses. This drive goes so far as to include the Divine Torah to its menu of emotionally appealing appetizers. To fools, the Torah in man's eye's is no better than a musical composition. The Torah is not viewed by man as the words of God, vital instructions for our lives. This is why the Torah mourns. She sees that her sole distinction as a vast sea of precise, divine concepts is completely overlooked, and is ignorantly viewed as "a harp for scorners".

The Torah herself responds - instead of God - thereby teaching that the Torah itself contains the answers. God designed it perfectly so if one seeks out wisdom, she will bear the fruits of the search without divine intervention. The words and formulations of the texts will provide both question and answer for the true investigator of God's wisdom. "Because God gives wisdom, from His mouth come knowledge and understanding (ibid)

What is God's statement, "what should the Jews involve themselves in when they eat and drink?" I feel the Talmud here offers insight into the two distinct roles played by God, and the Torah. God's role is the "Designer of man". And man includes the emotional, therefore God defends this aspect which He created. But the Torah is not responsible for man's design - she did not create man. That was solely God's doing. The Torah's goal is to address man, subsequent to man's creation. The Torah addresses man's dichotomized state, synthesizing his emotions and intelligence, thereby raising man from an instinctual being to "tzelem Elokim", a being partaking of God's intelligence. This explains why God on the one hand defends man's emotions, as He created them, whereas the Torah does not defend man's emotions, as she comes for a different purpose - to resolve those emotional conflicts by redirecting man to the world of wisdom.

"One who reads a verse at a party not in its time: This statement teaches that if one does in fact engage a verse for learning, but does so in a party as part of his joking, even though the verse was used properly - it was discussed as verses should be - nonetheless, the learning was functioning as a means to frivolity, and not for learning as an ends. The Talmud therefore also scorns this as abuse. So there are two forms to this error, 1) A total misunderstanding of the nature of the Scriptural verses displayed by a fool's singing of the verses, and 2) the engagement in the true nature of verses as a source of learning, but only used for personal means, as opposed to

the true ends for which they were divinely intended.

Reader's Response: There is no indication that any text besides Shir ha-Shirim falls under this discussion. If Rashi meant the prohibition to include other texts he should have mentioned them, but he did not. The "even though", as I see it, just reinforces the point I made in my last letter. Even though Shir ha-Shirim is a song, it cannot be sung because it is inappropriate to take a text meant to be taken metaphorically and use it as a literal love song, especially given the "adult" nature of some of the lyrics. Therefore you can only "read" it, so you can delve into its allegoric meaning. That reasoning, though, only applies to Shir ha-Shirim and not text whose religious meaning is apparent on a text level.

Mesora: Rav Moshe Feinstein zt"l prohibited the singing of verses and based his ruling on the quoted section in Talmud. His response can be found in Yoreh Daya II, Siman 142. Rav Moshe expressed that although the practice of singing scriptural verses is widespread, and even respected men engage in this practice, he states that it is certainly prohibited and he does not see a just reason for those who violate. Rav Moshe added that some might read Rashi as singling out Shir HaShirim alone as the only prohibited text, but Rav Moshe makes it clear that Rashi means to say that if Shir HaShirim is prohibited, certainly all other scriptural passages are prohibited. ■

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MSNBC is not "Making Sense"

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

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very rapid growth among the 25-54 male viewer bloc, and the "male 25-54 age segment is considered the most important group of viewers in terms of the value of television advertising." Because Keyes got more of this viewing group than Banfield every single night, his show was more financially beneficial to MSNBC than Banfield's show. When Keyes is canceled, support among the "most important group of viewers" will decrease. Yet MSNBC is claiming that Keyes' removal is simply a "business decision."

Neilsen ratings pose questions on the top ranking MSNBC executives who, on June 28, telephoned and faxed Mesora.org saying, "Banfield scored higher than Keyes on one night." It is known that stations use cumulatives ("cumes") to determine popularity, not individual shows. MSNBC's top executive said, "Keyes' hasn't shown significant growth..." In the MSNBC June 10 report, the network itself says, "Alan Keyes grows even more - +38 percent week to week." These confusing statements by MSNBC pose serious questions on their motive to remove Keyes. Keyes in fact has the higher scoring month of the two. Neilsen ratings show Keyes' highest rated night surpassed Banfield's at a 7-6 ratio - and this is despite Banfield having 20% more air time during May than did Keyes. Additionally, Banfield showed up on Neilsen ratings for only one month, in contrast to Keyes' five months. Would MSNBC use such limited data to make such a decision, or is there another reason for Keyes' removal?

MSNBC is hiring still more outspoken pro-Palestinians...the likes of Jeff Cohen. I listened to their recorded news casts supporting Palestinians. Cohen was just hired last month to be senior producer of Donahue's new show. Cohen is founder of the liberal media watchdog group, Fairness & Accuracy In Reporting -- known for its pro-Palestinian activism, among other things. FAIR favors the notion that Palestinian violence can be labeled "retaliation," and it states that a

person who "retaliates" is not responsible for his actions, since he was merely responding to "someone else's aggression." FAIR objects to the "tendency to define Israel's role as defensive, and the Palestinian role as aggressive." Up until last month, when he was hired by MSNBC, Cohen was on FAIR's board of directors.

In addition to acting as senior producer of Donahue's new show, Jeff Cohen will be appearing on MSNBC each weekday afternoon as an "on-air commentator." (Link: <http://www.fair.org/press-releases/cohen-resignation.html>) Cohen founded Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting in 1986. He stepped down from FAIR's board of directors in May 2002, when he was hired by MSNBC. (Link: <http://www.fair.org/extra/writers/cohen.html>)

FAIR favors the Palestinian viewpoint, particularly in its "action alerts" and "media advisories" dealing with the Middle East. (Link: <http://www.fair.org/international/middle-east.html>)

In an April 4, 2002 "action alert," FAIR recommends persuading the media to use the term "retaliation" when describing Palestinian action. FAIR explains this is important because those who "retaliate" are merely acting defensively "in response to someone else's aggression," and that the "responsibility for the cycle of violence [lies] at the doorstep of the party being 'retaliated' against, since they presumably initiated the conflict." Strangely, the action alert implies that, while both the Israelis and the Palestinians "retaliate," the Israelis are more at fault. The alert also warns against the tendency in the press to label Israel's role as defensive, and the Palestinian role as aggressive. (Link: <http://www.fair.org/activism/network-retaliation.html>)

A June 26th "media advisory" by FAIR refers to "land illegally seized by Israel after the 1967 war," and bemoans the fact that Palestinian suicide bombings in these regions were inaccurately reported to have been in Jerusalem instead of on "land illegally annexed by Israel." (Link: <http://www.fair.org/press-releases/settlement-euphemisms.html>)

Pat Buchanan co-anchors a two-hour afternoon MSNBC program. He's pro-Palestinian. . . "The cause of the present

intifada," Mr. Buchanan said, referring to the Arab name for the uprising that began in September 2000, "is the Israeli control and occupation" of Palestinian territory. (Link: <http://www.washtimes.com/national/20020501-91611235.htm>)

"The Israeli repression has radicalized the Palestinians." Buchanan suggests giving Palestinians their own state as a way to induce them to stop their terror attacks. (Link: <http://www.townhall.com/columnists/patbuchanan/pb20020403.shtml>)

Eric Alterman's list to MSNBC.com regarding pro- and anti-Israeli pundits: (Link: <http://polyconomics.com/showarticle.asp?articleid=1931>)

Alterman lists Keyes as pro-Israeli and Buchanan as pro-Palestinian, and suggests there is an imbalance in the media represented by the large number of pundits who unquestioningly support Israel.

I end up with a disturbing feeling in my stomach. How can human beings, let alone groups of news reporters, support the perpetrators of such violence, and their positions? How can they have anything positive to say of those villains who can calmly assemble a device designed to dismember the body of children, and ruin human lives? People who storm Israeli settlements and at point blank range, shoot and kill a five year old Danielle Shefi, must be condemned. I will most certainly shun and verbally denounce any human being having any word of consent for such atrocities. I will angrily blast any morally decayed soul who twists words suggesting the slightest acceptance of terror, who makes any equation at all between Israel's defense and Arafat's ruthless murders.

Our president said, "you are either for or against terror." I am only so thankful that our president and his staff have the morality and backbone to sense evil, and combat it in speech and action. My praise to you Mr. Bush, Mr. Cheney, Mr. Rumsfeld, Mr. Powell, and Ms. Rice.

I will no longer view MSNBC, and I have posted a petition to this effect: http://www.mesora.org/_private/alankeyes.html I ask all you who read this to sign. Send your message to MSNBC and their advertisers.

Those who hire people who cannot distinguish between self defense, and between bombs designed to shred children, is in my mind, an accomplice. □

Mohammed /Islam

RIVKA OLENICK

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The Rambam says: "Therefore, all the nations instigated by envy and impiety rose up against us, and all the kings of the earth motivated by injustice and enmity applied themselves to persecute us." There arose a new sect, which combined the two methods of conquest and controversy, into one, because it believed that this procedure would be more effective in wiping out every trace of the Jewish nation and religion. They claimed to prophecy and found a new faith, Islam, contrary to the Divine religion and to contend that it was equally God given. Thereby it hoped to raise doubts and create confusion, since one is opposed to the other and both supposedly emanate from a Divine source, which would lead to the destruction of both religions. For such a remarkable plan contrived by a man who is envious and querulous. He will strive to kill his enemy and to save his own life, but when he finds it impossible to attain his objective, he will devise a scheme whereby they both will be slain." He slays them both because he really knows that he cannot destroy God, but he cannot tolerate God's Divine word and so out of his own insanity he kills those who represent God and kills himself believing he will enter paradise.

The Torah states that the prophet that will arrive "from the midst of thee" is a person that will keep the Torah in tact as it was given to us by Moses from God. The Ninth Principle of our Thirteen Principles of Faith states: "I believe with perfect faith that the Torah will not be changed, and that there will never be another Torah given by God." As it says: "Thou shalt not add thereto, nor diminish from it." Deuteronomy 13:1.

"A prophet will the Lord thy God raise unto thee, from the midst of thee, of thy brethren." Islam took this sentence completely out of context and made inferences. All the statements before and after must be understood so that the meaning and purpose of the statements is known. The sentence quoted above was taken from a paragraph in Deuteronomy that specifically warns the Jewish people about the prohibitions of soothsaying, astrology, divination, sorcery, etc. The Gentiles believe they can manipulate and use these practices in order to predict and/or prevent future events. They even depend on using these methods, rather than seeking truth. Judaism adamantly opposes such practices. The Torah commands us many times that we are not allowed to use these means. All future

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Average number of viewers per night (Neilsen Ratings)

	Jan.	Feb.	Mar.	Apr.	May
Keyes	173,000 (P)	143,000	162,000	196,000	151,000
Banfield	No data	No data	No data	No data	173,000 (P)

Banfield and Keyes premiered (P) with identical numbers, yet MSNBC claims Banfield more promising.

"Based on what data?" is our question. Keyes leads with the highest month at 196,000 viewers.

Mohammed the False Prophet, Islam the False Religion

RIVKA OLENICK

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□ events that the Jewish people will learn of will be predicted by a Prophet and will all come true and that we would never have to resort to astrology or any other means in order to know truths. We rely on the truths spoken by our Prophets who will not give us any new laws or any new additions to the Torah. "Of thy brethren" means that the Prophet will be one of us, meaning the descendants of Jacob, not Esau or Ishmael. "But My covenant will I establish with Isaac whom Sarah will bear unto thee at this set time in the next year." "But God said: Not so, Sarah thy wife shall bear thee a son, and thou shalt call his name Isaac. With him will I keep My covenant for an everlasting covenant for his seed after him." Genesis 17: 19 and 21.

"It is, my co-religionists, one of the fundamental articles of the faith of Israel, that the future redeemer of our people will spring only from the stock of Solomon son of David. He will gather our nation, assemble our exiles, redeem us from our degradation, propagate the true religion, and exterminate his opponents, as it is clearly stated in Scripture, 'I see him but not now, I behold him but not high, there shall step forth a star out of Jacob, and a scepter shall arise out of Israel. And shall smite through the corners of Moab, and break down all the sons of Seth. And Edom shall be a possession, Seir also, even his enemies, shall be a possession, while Israel doeth valiantly'." Numbers 24:17-18

If any heretics rise up to corrupt the people, they will undermine the faith of the young folks and they will not find a savior. Beware of them and know that in our opinion, it is permitted to slay them, for they repudiate the statement in the prophecy of Moses who commanded us to act "According to the law which they shall teach thee, and according to the judgment which they shall tell thee thou shalt do." Deuteronomy 17:11. They assert in wicked defiance that they believe most firmly in the prophecy of Moses, as the Arabs and Byzantines say, yet they destroy and nullify his law and kill the adherents thereof. Whoever joins them is just like his seducer." The Rambam from Letter to Yemen. □

Can Man Perform Miracles

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

Barring a separate area, documented accounts where certain prophets and righteous individuals were granted a positive response from God, the notion of a rebbe or a tzaddik performing

miracles is becoming more and more prevalent. People in droves visit "rebbe" for his so called miracles, feeling he has greater powers than other men.

When running for their lives, why didn't Moses, the prophets, or Jacob perform miracles to escape danger? Why did Jacob pray to God and prepare a bribe and ready himself for battle? If Jacob and Moses did not perform miracles, how does anyone have the gall to suggest that today's less perfected people can out-perform those to whom God actually spoke? It is truly astonishing that people actually believe their rebbe to be on a higher level than a Jacob, or a Moses.

What is the Torah's view on man's powers? I will quote a few statements and Torah passages so you may learn for yourself, using your own reason to arrive at a conclusion. The Torah clearly denies man any power outside his own muscular abilities. Be careful not to feel intimidated by the masses who blindly accept and even wish for miracles. "Bkol darkecha day-hu", "In all areas know Him (God)", meaning, use your mind in all areas.

Saadia Gaon - "Emunos v'Daos" "I say also that it was for this very reason that God made the prophets equal to all other human beings in so far as death was concerned, lest man get the idea (and say wrongly to himself) 'just as these prophets were capable of living forever, in contradistinction to them, so were they also able to perform marvels in contradistinction to them.'"

Saadia Gaon says clearly that even prophets had no powers.

Rav Moshe Feinstein - When asked to give a blessing, Rav Moshe responded, "If you are learning, you have the greatest blessing of all, if you are not, there is nothing I can give you."

Moshe, Joshua, David HaMelech, Shlomo HaMelech - We do not see the Jews ever requesting blessings from Moshe Rabbeinu, from Joshua, Kings David, or King Solomon. This phenomena of seeking blessings was not practiced.

Moshe - Upon Pharaoh's request to end the plagues, Moshe left the city and prayed to God to halt the plagues. He did not do so himself, the wisest man to live, Moshe, understood well that man has no powers. Additionally, Moshe praised God as the sole, source of power. Why would Moshe do this if he too had powers?

Jacob - When Rachel asked Yaakov for children, Yaakov said, "Am I in G-d's stead?". Yaakov attested to the fact that he had no power to give her children. If people have powers, why did Jacob respond this way? It is clear that Jacob understood that no one is able to do what G-d does. Those were his very words, "Am I in G-d's stead?"

Elisha the Prophet - When Naaman requested Elisha to rid him of his leprosy, Elisha did not leave the house, but rather, he sent a messenger to instruct Naaman to bathe, and this would remove his ailment. Naaman was upset with Elisha, that he did not come out, call upon G-d's name, and "wave his hand over the place of the leprosy and remove it". A friend suggested wisely, that Elisha desired that G-d retain the grandeur for such a miracle, therefore, Elisha did not leave the house. He avoided the spotlight, as Elisha knew that G-d was the performer of all miracles, and did not want to mislead Naaman. Elisha was aware that people desire to believe in man as a miracle worker. Elisha therefore avoided credit for that which man has no connection with.

Daily Prayers - In L'ale Baruch Neimos we

read, "Hu livado poale gvuros", "He alone performs wonders....(He is) the Creator of healings, the Master of wonders". Our prayer says clearly, "God alone performs miracles."

Tosefta Sabbath - Chapter 7 The wearing of red threads on fingers is considered "ways of the Emorites". Against Judaism. (This clearly denounces the popular red bendels.)

Why then do rebbe and followers claim that rebbe perform miracles? This should be of no consequence to us. Claims from anyone, even from "rebbe", must not weigh more than the words of the Torah. People can, and do err, including rabbis. Their followers are apparently devoted to sustaining false claims of their rebbe's reputation as a miracle worker, even if it opposes Torah. To them, man is more central than God; "magical" reputations than perception; fallacy over reality.

Unfortunately, these rebbe are the individuals to whom communities look for Torah leadership, and they are doing the opposite by desiring self aggrandizement through malicious claims of holding miraculous powers. Rebbe's doing miracles, keys in challas, red bendels, checking mezuzot, and all such beliefs stem from a great insecurity in one's own life, and an underlying, disbelief in God's abilities outside physical objects.

"God alone performs wonders". We read this each day.

We must note that sometimes the rebbe himself does not start or support such claims, but it is the insecure followers who have a need to deify their rav, so they start the claims. Such a rebbe would be equally in the wrong, if he did not dispel such lies. He thereby leads his flock astray by his silence.

Both man and nature are created beings, and cannot deviate from God-given laws and properties. Man cannot alter that which is in God's exclusive control. Man cannot perform miracles. □

Bilam: Questions

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

Reader: I'm puzzled by the caption on your illustration of Bilam hitting the Donkey; The caption urges us to bring up the issue of "Metaphor" in explaining the incident to our children. Are you saying that the incident is a "metaphor" i.e. that Bilam's Donkey was not literally given the power of speech?

I know that there are those who offer this approach; However, very many of our Rabbis, in many periods, give exactly this passage as a "test case" for our emunah in HaShem's power to alter nature as He sees fit. It appears that your page totally ignores this opinion --held by some of the greatest scholars and kadoshim in our history. Am I understanding your intent correctly? If so, it would be shocking, disturbing, and a great shame --given your mission and energy and sincerity in pursuing it. I know you are very busy (doing, I know, very many very good things) but I would be grateful for a response when you have time.

Mesora: Would you feel it is a great shame if I told you that Rambam held this opinion? Well, he does. Or is it only a shame that Mesora holds this opinion?

If you feel Rambam is justified, but Mesora is not, on what basis do you feel Rambam has the right to think for himself, but Jews today do not?

Hashkafa, which this is, is not an area of psak (ruling), hence, their is no obligation to follow

someone's opinion, how ever great he may be. One cannot be told to believe that which he does not believe. That would be a lie. In halacha, yes. One must follow psak. But again, Choshen Mishpat even says that if one studied an area thoroughly, he is allowed to oppose his superiors for his own actions. So even in psak, the mind is what rules. Not conformity to reputations. In gemara, the "rove" rules. But Choshen Mishpat says that individually, one is allowed to use his own mind to arrive at psak.

What do you do when RambaN argues on RambaM? They said themselves that they cannot BOTH be right. So if one said the donkey was a metaphor, and the other, actuality, do you say "it is a shame" for that one? Since he opposed the other?

I urge you to think for yourself. Following reputations is of no credit to yourself. You will be especially bewildered, should you accept one authority on a given topic, only to find another more authoritative view oppose the first.

By what merit will you remain with the first view, or by what merit will you change to the next view?

Reader: I was aware of the Rambam's approach on this; The "shame" is not that there is such an approach, but rather that the audience you reach would not know that it's not the only approach (and, perhaps, even a minority approach by some calculations) ---and so might come to some very wrong conclusions that would surely disturb you, too. Consider: The Internet is a very popular medium, reaching all kinds of Jews with varied (and sometimes very little) background. For you to tell these Jews that Bilam's donkey is a metaphor --and say nothing more on the subject at all, (as was done in your Balak issue) could easily lead some to assume that krias Yam Suf and Matan Torah are also metaphors! Whatever opinion you may hold on a Torah subject, there is an added pedagogic concern in a popular medium about what others will understand. If you would have told people that there are various approaches among our Rabbis, there would have been much less room for error. Or, if you felt that you could only bring the metaphor position forward, then it would have been safer if you also explained to people that other non-natural occurrences in the Torah literally happened. But the way it went out, a large number of people could have been led to a real error. In any case, although it's hard to tell the "tone" of someone's remarks from an email, I get the feeling that you might have felt insulted in some way by my letter; That was not my intent at all, and if it was insulting in any way, please accept my apologies.

Mesora: Why then didn't Rambam himself teach the views of other Sages?

You must answer this dilemma. You claim that people should present all sides, yet the very Baalei HaMesora (transmitters of the law) did not ascribe to this.

You must conclude that the great Sages were honest, teaching only the view they saw as correct, omitting others, how ever great they were. We must do the same.

Regarding yam Suf and Matan Torah being taken metaphorically, Rambam states his criteria quite clearly. Only when a "malach" (an angel) is mentioned to have talked or to have appeared in an account, does Rambam interpret the account and a vision, or something other than physical phenomena. This removes the possibility of metaphorizing biblical accounts when angels talked or appeared. See this article: Angels □