

SPECIAL ISSUE
Selihot & Tehillim

ESTD
1997

JewishTimes

Volume V, No. 40...Sept. 15, 2006

WWW.MESORA.ORG/JEWISHTIMES

Download and Print Free

IN THIS ISSUE

PARSHA: NETZAVIM	I-4
POWER OF SELIHOT	I,8-10
TEHILLIM & MEZUZA	I,5-7
LETTERS	II,12

**SUPPORT THE
JEWISHTIMES**
EDUCATING 1000S WORLDWIDE



WWW.MESORA.ORG/DONATE

CANDLE LIGHTING 9/15

Boston	6:38	Moscow	6:32
Chicago	6:43	New York	6:48
Cleveland	7:19	Paris	7:47
Detroit	7:25	Philadelphia	6:52
Houston	7:10	Phoenix	6:18
Jerusalem	6:28	Pittsburgh	7:12
Johannesburg	5:42	Seattle	7:05
Los Angeles	6:42	Sydney	5:39
London	6:58	Tokyo	5:31
Miami	7:08	Toronto	7:12
Montreal	6:49	Washington DC	6:59

Weekly Parsha

Netzavim

RABBI BERNARD FOX

"You stand here today, all of you, before Hashem your G-d, the leaders of your tribes, your elders, and your officers, all the men of Israel." (Devarim 29:9)

In the first pasuk of parasha, Moshe explains to the people that the entire nation of Bnai Yisrael is

(continued on next page)

the Mysterious power of Selihot

RABBI JOSHUA MAROOF

The Source of Selihot

The chanting of Selihot, or prayers for forgiveness, is an essential feature of the High Holiday experience. In Sephardic communities, Selihot are said beginning from the second day of the Hebrew Month of Elul. Because we are already two weeks

(continued on page 8)

"Maaseh Avos, siman l'Banim." The patriarchs and matriarchs never endorsed amulets or segulas. They labored their best, and prayed to God. He favored them. Let us follow their lessons which God endorsed in His Torah.

Egypt labored in life for their imagined afterlife, forfeiting both in idolatrous beliefs and practices. Judaism rejects mysticism – God alone controls our fate. And for those souls perfected in Torah's bliss, the soul is rendered eternal.

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

Tehillim & Mezuza

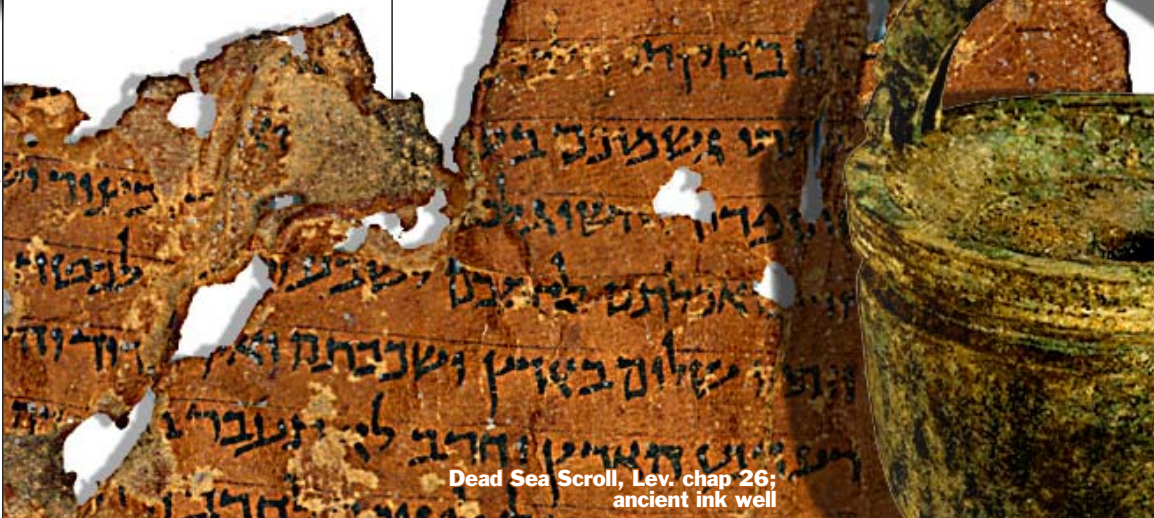
PROTECTION vs HEALING

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

Many beliefs abound in Jewish communities today. For these many beliefs, there exists no Torah basis. Torah demands we adhere to truth and not fool ourselves; we are to follow only those ideas based in reality, and Torah alone is the exclusive authority on what is real. When instructing us in Torah, our great Rabbis quoted Torah verses or Talmudic sources.

To insure that the Judaism we follow is

(continued on page 5)



Dead Sea Scroll, Lev. chap 26;
ancient ink well

(Netzavim cont. from pg. 1)

Weekly Parsha

JewishTimes

Weekly Journal on Jewish Thought



The JewishTimes is published every Friday and delivered by email. **Subscriptions are FREE.** To subscribe, send any email message to: subscribe@mesora.org

Subscribers will also receive our advertisers' emails and our regular email announcements.

Contacts:

We invite feedback or any questions at this address: jewishtimes@mesora.org
Ph(516)569-8888 Fx(516)569-0404

Advertising:

<https://www.Mesora.org/Advertising>

Donations:

<https://www.Mesora.org/Donate>

Content at Mesora.org:

JewishTimes Archives:

<http://www.Mesora.org/JewishTimes>

Philosophy Archives:

<http://www.Mesora.org/Philosophy>

Weekly Parsha Archives:

<http://www.Mesora.org/WeeklyParsha>

Audio Archives:

<http://www.Mesora.org/Audio>

Interactive, Live, Audible Sessions:

<http://www.Mesora.org/TalkLive>

Database Search:

<http://www.Mesora.org/Search>

Articles may be reprinted without consent of the JewishTimes or the authors, provided the content is not altered, and credits are given.

standing before Hashem. Moshe continues to explain that the nation will now enter into a covenant with Hashem. Moshe had previously facilitated a covenant between Hashem and Bnai Yisrael. This previous covenant was created at Sinai. What is the difference between these covenants? How does the covenant described in this week's parasha differ from the covenant of Sinai?

According to Rashi, the covenant at Sinai preceded the receiving of the entire Torah. With this covenant, the people made a commitment to observe those commandments that had been revealed prior to Sinai. These commandments included the seven mitzvot that Hashem had revealed to Noach and the mitzvot that Hashem had revealed to Bnai Yisrael before their arrival at Sinai.[1] Bnai Yisrael made this commitment with the declaration na'aseh ve'nishma – we will hear and we will do. In return for this commitment, Hashem revealed the Torah in its entirety to Bnai Yisrael.

In contrast, Rashi interprets the covenant in this week's parasha as the creation of a relationship with between Bnai Yisrael and Hashem. Bnai Yisrael agrees to accept Hashem as their G-d and Hashem agrees to accept Bnai Yisrael as His nation. There are two elements to this relationship. Presumably it includes a commitment by Bnai Yisrael to accept the Torah and to observe its mitzvot. But in addition to this commitment, the covenant involves an acceptance blessings and curses that Moshe has previously described and to which he again makes reference in this week's parasha.[2] Observance of the mitzvot will be rewarded with abundance in the Land of Israel. Neglect of the commandments will be punished by suffering, exile and persecution.

Nachmanides offers a different interpretation of these two covenants. He explains that the covenant at Sinai was a commitment by Bnai Yisrael to observe the entire Torah. However, although the Torah outlines punishments for

the violation of many of the mitzvot, the original covenant did not include an acceptance of the blessings and curses outlined in Sefer Devarim. These blessings and curses establish a relationship between the welfare of the nation – in its entirety – and its commitment to the observance of the Torah. In other words, with the acceptance of this covenant Bnai Yisrael – as a nation – accepted that the future wellbeing of the people would be determined by its observance of the Torah.[3] In short, the covenant at Sinai was a commitment to observance of the Torah. The covenant in this week's parasha is an acceptance of the consequences for observance or neglect of the Torah.

“It is a positive commandment of the Torah to hear the sounding of the Shofar on Rosh HaShanna as it states, “A day of Shofar blast it should be to you.” (Maimonides, Mishne Torah, Laws of Shofar 1:1)

One of the mitzvot that is strongly associated with Rosh HaShanna is the sounding of the Shofar. According to the Torah, we are required to sound nine blasts – the combination of Tekiah, Teruah, Tekiah three times. This is represented by the following table:

Table 1. Requirement described by Torah:

Tekiah	Teruah	Tekiah
Tekiah	Teruah	Tekiah
Tekiah	Teruah	Tekiah

However, in order to fulfill this obligation, we are required to sound thirty blasts. How, does the Torah obligation to sound nine blasts translate into an obligation to sound thirty blasts?

There are two factors at play in this conversion of a requirement to sound nine blasts into the requirement to sound thirty. The Torah requires that we sound the series of Tekiah, Teruah, Tekiah three times. Part of this obligation is easily understood. The Tekiah is an uninterrupted blast. There is little or no room for uncertainty regarding its character. However, the Teruah is a sound characterized by interrupted

(continued on next page)

notes. This is a much more complicated sound. Complication leaves room for doubts. What is the exact description of the “interrupted” blast? The Sages identified three possibilities. First, the Teruah may be a series of minimal sounds – the sound we refer to as Teruah. Second, the true Teruah may be a more substantial sound that is interrupted – the sound we refer to as Shevarim. Finally, the true Teruah may be a combination of these first two possibilities – the sound we refer to as Shevarim/Teruah. In short, the Torah requires that we sound the combination of a Teruah preceded and followed by a Tekiah three times – a total of nine blasts. However, this nature of the central Teruah is unknown. The three central blasts that we sound – Teruah, Shevarim and Shevarim/Teruah – are actually three possible identities of the true Teruah required by the Torah.[4] The following table represents the result of the doubt regarding the exact nature of the central Teruah sound:

Table 2. Minimum series of sounds required to satisfy Torah obligation:

Tekiah	Shevarim/Teruah	Tekiah
Tekiah	Shevarim/Teruah	Tekiah
Tekiah	Shevarim/Teruah	Tekiah
Tekiah	Shevarim	Tekiah
Tekiah	Shevarim	Tekiah
Tekiah	Shevarim	Tekiah
Tekiah	Teruah	Tekiah
Tekiah	Teruah	Tekiah
Tekiah	Teruah	Tekiah

How many sounds are there in the above table? One might reasonably conclude that the above table includes 27 sounds. However by convention, the Shevarim/Teruah sound is counted as two sounds. So, traditionally this table is described as including 30 sounds. This calculation is represented in the following table:

Table 3. Calculation of total number of sounds required to satisfy Torah obligation:

Series	Number of sound in series
Tekiah, Shevarim/Teruah, Tekiah	4
Tekiah, Shevarim/Teruah, Tekiah	4
Tekiah, Shevarim/Teruah, Tekiah	4
Tekiah, Shevarim, Tekiah	3
Tekiah, Shevarim, Tekiah	3
Tekiah, Shevarim, Tekiah	3
Tekiah, Teruah, Tekiah	3
Tekiah, Teruah, Tekiah	3
Tekiah, Teruah, Tekiah	3
Total sounds	30

The dispute over the true nature of the Teruah is somewhat curious. It is clear that the Sages are certain that the character of the Teruah contrasts with the character of the Tekiah. Therefore, because the Tekiah is an uninterrupted blast, the Teruah must be an interrupted



sound. However, how can we account for the development of these three alternative interpretations of the specific nature of the Teruah?

Aruch HaShulchan offers an interesting explanation. He bases his explanation on a comment of the Sages. In the passage above from Mishne Torah, Maimonides quotes the pasuk in the Torah that is the source for the obligation to sound the Shofar on Rosh HaShanna. The literal translation of the pasuk is “a day of Teruah it should be for you.” Unkelus translates the word Teruah in the passage as crying – “a day of crying it should be for you.” The Talmud explains that the Sages’ understand Unkelus’s translation as providing a description of the Teruah. The Teruah imitates the sound of crying. However, crying can take three forms. Sometimes, one cries in long sobs. The Shevarim sound is an imitation of this form of crying. On other

occasions, one cries in short shrieks. This form of crying is imitated by the sound that we refer to as Teruah. And sometimes crying combines these two forms of crying. This last possibility is imitated by the Shevarim/Teruah. In other words, the Sages know that the Teruah mentioned by the Torah is an imitation of crying.[5] However, they differ in precisely which of the various forms of crying the Teruah is intended to imitate.

Aruch HaShulchan suggests that the Talmud’s comparison of Teruah to crying is not merely intended to provide a description of the character of the sound. Instead, the Talmud is telling us that the Teruah is intended to express the activity of crying. In sounding the Teruah, we are engaging in an act of crying. We are expressing anguish. The dispute in the Talmud is over the nature of the anguish that we are required to express through the Teruah. According to Aruch HaShulchan’s interpretation the Shevarim sound expresses groans of pain and the conventional Teruah sound expresses the cries of lamentation.[6] Apparently, he maintains that pain and lamentation are each component themes of Rosh HaShanna. The dispute between the Sages is over which of these themes is to be reflected in the Shofar sound or if both themes are to be reflected.

Although this approach to explaining the debate of the true nature of the Teruah is interesting, it presents two problems. First, it is difficult to identify the actual alternative themes in Rosh HaShanna to which the various interpretations of the Teruah refer. In other words, we can easily understand that on Rosh HaShanna we should lament our condition and even anticipate with anxiety the coming judgment we will receive. But it is difficult to identify how this experience can be alternatively interpreted as an encounter with pain, an expression of lamentation, or both.

The second difficulty stems from a comment of Rav Hai mentioned by Aruch HaShulchan. Rav Hai maintains that all three of the interpretations of Teruah are valid and proper. There is no actual dispute regarding the character of the Teruah sound. Instead, all three interpretations essentially fulfill the requirement of sounding the Teruah sound. On a Torah level, any one of these three interpretations is acceptable.

However, in different communities different interpretations developed. The Sages wished to establish uniformity in the interpretation of Teruah. The Sages did not wish to choose one of these interpretations for universal implementation and suppress the alternatives. Instead, in order to establish a uniform, universal practice, they required that the Teruah should be sounded according to all of the various valid

(continued on next page)

(Netzavim continued from page 3)

Weekly Parsha

interpretations.[7]

Rav Hai's position is difficult to reconcile with Aruch HaShulchan's explanation of the three alternative interpretations of the Teruah. It is somewhat unlikely that each of these interpretations is a reference to an alternative theme in Rosh HaShanna – as Aruch HaShulchan suggests – and to maintain that each of these interpretations is valid according to the Torah! Certainly, the Torah is not unconcerned with the theme or themes of Rosh HaShanna that we are to express through the Shofar and leaves it to us to decide!

These problems suggest an alternative interpretation of the discussion in the Talmud. As noted above, the Talmud interprets the term Teruah to mean “cry.” Rabbaynu Yom Tov ben Avraham Isbili – Ritva – suggests that the Talmud is not suggesting that the Teruah is intended to express crying. Instead, the Talmud is only providing a description of the Teruah sound. The intention of this description is to communicate that the Teruah is a broken sound. The discussion in the Talmud is over the specific nature of this broken sound.[8]

Ritva's approach suggests that the discussion in the Talmud should be interpreted as an analysis of the character of a “broken” Shofar blast. This broken character can be created by sounding a series of minimal notes that emerge as a Shofar blast through being sounded in series. This is the conventional Teruah. Alternatively, the “broken” character can emerge through breaking the Tekiah into smaller components – at least three components. This interpretation is expressed in our Shevarim. In other words, the character of a “broken” blast can emerge from the inherent minimal nature of the component notes – the conventional Teruah. Alternatively, the broken character can emerge from the relative length on the component notes as compared to the Tekiah – our Shevarim. Finally, it is possible that the true Teruah must include both of these alternative interpretations – our Shevarim/Teruah.

This explanation of the Talmud allows for the discussion to be interpreted as a dispute between the Sages. It is also consistent with the position of Rav Hai. In other words, it is possible that the Sages are in agreement that the Teruah of the Torah is a broken sound but they dispute the exact character of this broken sound. It is also possible – as Rav Hai maintains – that the Torah merely requires the sounding of a broken sound but does not specify the precise manner in which we should create this sound. All of our interpretations of Teruah are valid and fulfill the Torah requirement. ■

[1] Rabbaynu Shlomo ben Yitzchak (Rashi), Commentary on Sefer Shemot 24:3.

[2] Rabbaynu Shlomo ben Yitzchak (Rashi), Commentary on Sefer Devarim 29:12.

[3] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Nachman (Ramban / Nachmanides), Commentary on Sefer Devarim 29:9. Commentary on Sefer Shemot 24:1.

[4] Mesechet Rosh HaShanna 33b – 34a.

[5] Mesechet Rosh HaShanna 33b.


[6] Rav Aharon HaLeyve Epstein, Aruch HaShulchan, Orech Chayim 590:2-3.

[7] Rav Aharon HaLeyve Epstein, Aruch HaShulchan, Orech Chayim 590:4.

[8] Rabbaynu Yom Tov ben Avraham Isbili (Ritva), Commentary on the Talmud, Mesechet Rosh HaShanna 34b.


5767
MESORA & JewishTimes
2006

ROSH HASHANNAH



Mesora wishes all of our readers a very happy and healthy Rosh Hashannah!

We hope you have enjoyed another year of the JewishTimes, and we thank you for participating in our campaigns assisting Israel and other causes. This year, our readership has doubled. And with over half a million visits to our website, we are truly reaching many deeply appreciative people worldwide as our “Letters” page shows.



From teens to grandparents – from New York to Israel, Mesora's free website and JewishTimes improves Jewish life of all ages worldwide. We have posted 100s of new articles, 40 issues of the JewishTimes, responses to readers' important questions, audio classes, and live, interactive lectures attended globally...all free.

As we enter this New Year, we ask you to join in the Mitzvah of Jewish outreach. May your donations contribute to your success, and may you all be written and sealed for life, health and prosperity. *Thank you*

Donate by regular mail:

Mesora of NY, Inc.
553 Central Ave. #19A
Cedarhurst, NY 11516

Donate securely online:

www.Mesora.org/Donate

(Tehillim continued from page 1)

False Beliefs

authentic, and not based on human fabrication, we too must follow the Rabbis' lead, and only practice and believe those ideas and acts that are found in the Torah, or in the Talmud. If however, we observe other religious Jews practicing that which is not located in these sources, we must realize that such practices are not from the Torah, but from man. It must not matter to us if the practitioner is a great leader, or a Rabbi, for all humans err[1], including Moses. Therefore, assuming any leader today is infallible, or that what is found in books must be true, one subscribes to false beliefs. We must adhere to the Torah's words, or to sources in the Talmud as being the exclusive and final word.

Having made that introduction, it behooves us to further examine our Torah's opinion regarding a series of topics we have recently addressed here in the JewishTimes. Until now, we have attempted to communicate the fallacy of amulets, segulas, and all Nichush (sorcery) practices prohibited by the Torah. We have cited Maimonides – one of our greatest minds – as clearly prohibiting any act, which claims that naturally unrelated causes will generate some desired effect. For this reason, Torah prohibits rabbit's feet and horseshoes, as they are unrelated to the desired result of success or wealth. Similarly, Chamsas, Red Bendels, Challas with keys or lucky pennies, are all permutations of the same prohibition. All of these items possess no property, which affects success, health, wealth, or pregnancy...or any other imagined benefit. And if one uses these objects in practice, then this person violates a Torah prohibition of Nichush – not to practice sorcery. Sorcery falls under the larger heading of idolatry, the very antithesis to Torah and One God, and is prohibited precisely because it is false. As beings granted with intelligence as God wishes, we are to live by wisdom and proofs, what our minds determine is true. We are not to perform an act that is baseless, based in blind faith, or function with simple acceptance, as do the other religionists.

Tehillim

What has become popular today is the recitation of Tehillim (Psalms) when a person falls sick. Although meaning well, practitioners must ask honestly, "Is this condoned by the Torah?" before practicing. Certainly, we must ask if Tehillim's author – King David – endorsed this practice of recitation as a means of bodily healing. From reading Tehillim, we learn that King David offered praises to God for His multiple manifestations of salvation, and for His works in nature, what we refer to as "Hashgacha Pratiyos, and Hashgacha Klaliyos", or individual and general (natural) providence. But we do not read that King David practiced Tehillim recitation when his son fell sick, or for any other tragedy or mishap. King

David's response was Tefilah – prayer. This is what our Rabbis have instructed us to do when we are sick, or if we are in any need of God's assistance for ourselves, or others. But we do not find that recitation, with the understanding that it "automatically cures" is an acceptable practice. "Studying" Tehillim – not mere recitation – is another matter, and admirable. But reciting

Tehillim alone, with no subsequent prayer is not the Torah's response.

It is appropriate to reprint a recent translation of Jewish law:

"The prohibition against employing charms" (Sefer Chinuch, Mitzva 512)

(continued on next page)

- Corporate Identity • Website Design
- Marketing • Advertising • Fund Raising
- Package Design • Presentations
- Flash Animations • Business Plans

516.569.8888 info@NYDesign.com

Where Good Design is Smart Business



[That]

We were restricted not to make incantations about any matter. In substance, this refers to a man who will say words, then tell people that those words helped or caused harm in any particular matter. About this it is stated, "There shall not be found among you...a charmer (Deuteronomy 18:10-11)." In the language of the Midrash Sifre: It is all the same thing, whether a person casts a charm on a snake or casts a charm on a scorpion — in other words, he says words over them so that they won't bite him, according to his opinion. So too if one says words over a wound in order to be relieved of the pain (i.e. recites a pasuk to cure a wound).

Now perhaps, my son, you might pose a question to me from what we read in the Talmud Shevuos 15b: The Psalm against evil occurrences is with lutes and lyres (Psalms 91), and then he says Psalm 3. In other words, the recital of these Psalms is of use to provide

protection from harm. And it says in tractate Brachos 3a: R. Joshua b. Levi would say these verses and go to bed.

However, this matter is not similar (perish the thought) to the business of a charmer that we mentioned. Long ago, the Sages of blessed memory said in this regard (Shevuos 15b): It is forbidden to heal oneself with words of Torah. Yet they mentioned to say these Psalms, since they contain words that inspire the soul that knows them, to shelter in the Eternal Lord, place all his trust in Him, establish a reverent fear of Him firmly in his heart, and rely on His kindness and goodness. As a result of his awareness about this, he will be protected, without any doubt from every harm. This is what was answered in the Talmud in this regard. For it was asked there, but how could R. Joshua do this? Here R. Joshua said it was forbidden to heal oneself with words of Torah! And the reply was

given: To secure protection, it is a different matter. In other words, the Torah did not forbid a man to say words of Torah so as to arouse his soul in a good direction, so that this merit should shield him to protect him." (End of translation)

Note: Recitation without understanding cannot possibly be considered something that helps a person focus on the concepts of bitachon, fear of Hashem, and reliance on His kindness. A person's merit protects him, not the words of Psalms. He gains merit when he ponders the words of Psalms and they become real to him, not when he recites them without understanding them. (Translation and notes by Jessie Fischbein)

Accordingly, what truly protects us is God alone, and only for those of us who come close to Him in study. So if one "studies" Tehillim, he or she brings him/herself closer to God, and God will surely protect them. But mere recitation is not condoned

here. Additionally, the Talmud teaches that one may only practice this if he is healthy, but if one is sick and desires the removal of an illness based on reciting Tehillim, this is prohibited. We must understand this distinction.

The Mishna and Talmud state that one, who recites Torah verses intending to heal a wound, loses his share in the World to Come. One source is found in Talmud Shavuot mentioned above. The Talmud describes how certain Torah verses were recited in connection with sacrifices and with afflictions. Rabbi Yehoshua then asks:

"How is it permissible for one to recite Torah verses to heal an illness, for Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi stated [elsewhere] 'It is prohibited to heal one's self with words of Torah'. [The Talmud answers,] 'To shield one's self is different [permitted]. But when we said it is prohibited, applies only to a case where one has a wound: if one has a wound, it is prohibited, but if he has no wound, it is permissible.' [The Talmud then asks,] 'It is only prohibited, and nothing worse? But have we not learned, 'One who recites verses over his wound has no share in the World to Come?[2]' Rabbi Yochanan answered, 'This applies to one who spat[3] on his wound and then recited a verse, for one must not recite God's name [in a Torah verse] next to spittle'."

Rabbi Yochanan clarified that one loses his share in the World to Come only when he recited God's name (a verse) over a wound where he spat. But if he did not spit, although he does not forfeit the World to Come, the recitation over a wound is still a prohibition. It must be clear: no view permits any recitation to remove an illness. The distinction made by Rabbi Yochanan is that to forfeit the World to come, one must recite a verse next to spittle, whereas others claim this forfeiture happens regardless of the presence of spittle. But all views — with or without spittle present — make clear that reciting a verse for healing purposes is prohibited.

Maimonides teaches:

"One who whispers over a wound, or recites a Torah verse, and also one who reads for an infant so it should not be worried, and on who places a Sefer Torah or Tefillin on a minors so they might sleep, it is insufficient for them that they are considered enchanters (Nachashim) and diviners (Chovrim), but they are in the category of deniers of the Torah -- rendering Torah as a bodily remedy, when the Torah is truly only a remedy for the soul."

(continued on next page)

Maimonides teaches that Torah has one purpose: to benefit our souls, not our bodies. This makes sense, since Torah is “ideas” and not a medicinal substance. Assuming a healing property exists in recitations is as idolatrous as any other practice, like rubbing a rabbit’s foot for good luck. It matters none that the object of the idolatrous practice is, in one case, an animal’s limb, or in another, a Torah object. If Torah does not sanction the goal, then one is projecting magical, false beliefs, and this is the prohibition.

Similarly, a mezuzah is not a protection for the body, and if one acts so, he forfeits his share in the World to Come. There is no reason to distinguish between a mezuzah and Tehillim.

Protection vs Healing

But we must now return to what the Talmud does permit: recitation of Torah verses to “shield” us is permitted, – not “heal” us. What is the difference?

Gilyon M’harsha writes[4],

“If one affixes the mezuzah for the reason of fulfilling the command, one may consider that as reward for doing so he will be watched by God. But, if one affixes the mezuzah solely for protective reasons, it in fact has no guidance, and the mezuzah will be as knives in his eyes”.

These are very strong words. But what is his lesson? He is teaching us that God is the only source of protection, and that physical objects have no power. Rather, if one feels they do, these objects, even a mezuzah, will be the opposite, “knives in his eyes” – something destructive. We say every day, “He (God) alone is the master of wonders”. This means that nothing but God can affect our lives negatively, or positively. Maimonides also teaches that one – who is healthy – may recite songs or Tehillim, and assume that in the merit of such a recital, he will be shielded from mishaps. So why are we allowed to recite Tehillim to shield us, but not to cure us, or others?

I believe the difference is simple. Reciting Tehillim to heal a sick person assumes a baseless notion that a direct cause and effect relationship exists between Torah words, and bodily welfare. However, the Torah and reality provide no grounds for this assumption. Again, Torah words have the sole purpose of benefiting our souls.

The Rabbis unanimously agree: if one “studies” the Torah’s words and is inspired by these truths, or if one performs mitzvahs, then he or she can rest assured that God will protect from all mishap. But we must stress that this applies

only to the “performer” of these correct acts, and not another person. So even if one correctly studies Tehillim, this cannot affect another person. That sick person is in need of these perfecting acts on their own. Of course, we must pray for others, for if we do not, then we are at fault for lacking love for others.

Summary

In the end, we find no source, or reasoning, that endorses the belief that the mere recital of Tehillim – or any words – will cause any benefit to anyone. The opposite is true: it is prohibited. While it is praiseworthy that so many Tehillim groups exist, any act we perform must come under the direction of Torah law, which we have elaborated upon here. Reciting Tehillim to remove illness is prohibited. Studying Torah and performing mitzvahs will earn us God’s protection, if we are healthy and not seeking a cure. For if we think we can cure existing illnesses with Torah’s words, we thereby attribute false healing powers to something incapable of healing, as the Rabbis taught, “It is prohibited to heal one’s self with words of Torah”.

Practically, what shall we do moving forward? This must be answered in two parts: 1) how do we help ourselves, and 2) how do we help others. For ourselves, we have the answers: we follow Torah law, and continue to study. And if we are ill, the Talmud suggests: (Tal. Baba Basra, 116b) “Rabbi Pinchas said, ‘If one has a sick person in his house, he shall travel to a wise person who shall seek mercy for him, as it is said, ‘The anger of a king is the angel of death, but a wise person will atone.’”[5] Why should one seek a “wise person” as opposed to another? The answer is because the matter of the sick person requires investigation, only possible through a wise person who can uncover our faults, and hopefully enlighten us to a path of repentance. But we cannot recite Torah words assuming any healing powers, nor did the Talmud suggest this. And for others who need healing, we should pray for them, and advise them of a wise person who can investigate the person, and enlighten them to their flaws. But again, reciting Torah words or Tehillim is not the Torah’s prescribed remedy.

As Rabbi Reuven Mann recently recalled, “It could be due to the merit of another more perfected person, that I will obtain God’s favor: God might save me, since my death could negatively impact another person.” This however does not remove the prohibition to recite Tehillim for any sickness, for anyone. This concept stated by Rabbi Mann means – as the Torah taught – that God will intercede on behalf

of one person, due to the perfection of another. Thus, God saved the Jews during the Golden Calf, due to Moses’ prayer. God may also save my friend today, if his illness negatively impacts me, and, if God is that concerned for me based on my level or perfection. But who am I to say that God will save my friend based on my prayer? Surely, the correct approach is that the sick person gains contact with a wise person. And even in the case where God saved the Jews due to Moses, Moses was the most perfected person, and even then, it was only due to God’s instructing Moses to pray, that Moses did so, and that it was effective. But until instructed by God, Moses did not feel he could do anything for the Jews. Rashi said he was weak and was not going to pray. So we are not at liberty to determine when prayer is effective, although we must pray in any case, for it might be.

Since Moses did not feel his actions could save the Jews, how can we be certain that our actions will save our friends, or the sick? I am not sure, but we could “study” Tehillim, gain more knowledge about God, and perhaps as God would protect us due to the merit of Torah study and our mitzvahs, God “may” save another person for whom we pray, if we find favor in His sight through our proper performances.

The certain path we must take is what the Torah prescribes. So we must all follow the Torah meticulously, and not continue practicing what might be popular, or intuitively “correct”. We must be concerned for others, and again, it is admirable that so many Tehillim groups exist. But we must reevaluate such groups in light of the Torah’s sources. We will surely not gain God’s favor, if we think Tehillim itself is a cure. It is truly harmful to the sick, and ourselves if we recite Tehillim, assuming ideas rejected by Torah.

May we all continue to reevaluate our ways, and abandon false beliefs not found in Torah, that actions or objects remove illnesses. May we instead, insure we are on God’s path outlined in His Torah, and in that merit, may we earn His future protection. Sharing these ideas with the sick is what appears to be the proper course of action. For if the sick do not increase their knowledge of Torah, mitzvahs and themselves...and repent, why shall God cure them? This was the entire lesson of Job. ■

[1] “For man is not righteous in the land who does good and does not sin.” (Ecclesiastes, 7:20)

[2] Mishna Sanhedrin 11:1 / Talmud Sanhedrin 90a

[3] Apparently to soothe his sore

[4] Yoreh Dayah, 289 (page 113 on the bottom)

[5] Proverbs, 16:14

(Selihot continued from page 1)

Prayers

into the Selihot season - and, for Ashkenazim, the season is only a week away - I thought it would be appropriate for us to take the time to reflect upon the remarkable place that Selihot have in our tradition. The whole concept of Selihot is derived from an important narrative in the Torah.

The centerpiece of the Selihot prayers is the recitation of the Thirteen Attributes of Mercy, which are included at strategic points in the service. The basis for incorporating the Attributes into our supplications is a passage in the Talmud, Tractate Rosh Hashana 17B:

"And He passed before him and called out 'Hashem, Hashem...' Rabbi Yohanan said: If not for the written text, we would not be able to say this - So to speak, Hashem wrapped Himself in a prayer shawl like a cantor and showed Moshe the order of the prayers. He said 'anytime that the Jews sin, if they recite this order before Me, I will forgive them' ...Rav Yehudah said: There is a covenant sealed regarding the Thirteen Attributes of Mercy, such that one who recites them is never turned away empty-handed."

This passage presents us with an obvious difficulty. How can the mere repetition of words guarantee forgiveness for the Jewish people? Isn't repentance a necessary precondition for atonement? At the same time, the Rabbis emphasize that they saw the institution of Selihot as securely rooted in the Biblical text. This suggests that we will be able to understand the purpose of these prayers if we explore the context in the Book of Exodus from which they are derived.

Covenantal Chaos

The narrative the Sages are citing follows immediately after the sin

of the Golden Calf in Parashat Ki Tissa. Moshe is busy receiving commandments from God atop Mount Sinai, when he is apprised of an emergent crisis - the Jews are worshipping an idol down below! Hashem addresses Moshe with these words:

"Go down, for your people whom you took out of Egypt has become corrupt..."

Hashem dissociates Himself from the Israelites at this juncture, identifying them as "your (i.e., Moshe's)" people and attributing the Exodus itself to Moshe. Hashem suggests that the Jews be annihilated, and that Moshe become the patriarch of a great nation to replace them. However, Moshe protests:

"And Moshe pleaded with Hashem his God, and said, 'Why, Hashem, will Your anger flare up against Your people whom You have taken out of Egypt, with great strength and an outstretched arm...Return from Your wrath, and change Your mind about doing evil to Your people..."

Moshe is emphatic about the notion that the Jews, although they have sinned, remain the people of God whom He brought out of Egypt for a Divine purpose. He argues that completely wiping them out will have serious implications for the way Hashem is perceived in the world. Hashem relents and opts not to punish the Children of

Israel quite as severely as He had first proposed.

Despite his advocacy on behalf of his people, when Moshe descends to find the Israelites dancing about a molten idol, he lifts up the Tablets of Testimony and smashes them. The Tablets had the Ten Commandments engraved upon them and were designed as an eternal reminder of the Revelation that the Jews experienced at Sinai. The act of destroying them was meant to demonstrate that the Covenant of Sinai had been irreparably broken.

Hashem subsequently informs Moshe that, although He will not destroy the Jews, His relationship with them will never again be the same:

"And now, take this people to the land...Behold, my angel will go before them. For I shall not go up with you, for you are a stiff-necked people, lest I annihilate you on the way."

Moshe's Intervention

The original plan had been for the Israelites to enter their land accompanied by miraculous Divine intervention comparable to what they had witnessed in Egypt. Now, Hashem tells Moshe that the assistance He will offer them will be more subtle and indirect. The Jews are deeply saddened by this development, and Moshe intercedes on their behalf. What ensues is one of the most cryptic dialogues in the entire Torah:

"And Moshe said to Hashem, 'Behold You said to me 'raise up this people', but You did not tell me whom You would send with me; yet, You said 'I have known you by name', and that I found favor in Your eyes. And now, make known to me Your ways, and let me know You, so that I shall find favor in Your eyes - and behold, this nation is Your people.'"

And He said, "My presence will go forth and provide you rest."

And Moshe said to Him, "If Your presence does not go along, do not bring us forth from here. How then will it be known that I have found favor in Your eyes - I and Your people - unless You accompany us, and I and Your people will be made distinct from every people on the face of the earth."

Hashem said to Moshe, "Even this thing of which you spoke I shall do, for you have found favor in My eyes, and I have known you by name."

There are two crucial elements of this dialogue that require further analysis:

(continued on next page)



Moshe's Purpose: Personal, National or Both?

It would seem that Moshe's main objective in his prayer is to secure a higher level of Providential intervention for the Jewish people. He emphasizes the importance of Hashem "accompanying" the Jews along their journey and throughout the conquest of the Land of Israel. The nations of the world, and the Jews themselves, will lose out on an opportunity to recognize God's involvement in human history if the promises to the Patriarchs are fulfilled in a less-than-sensational manner.

At the same time, Moshe includes special pleading on his own behalf, referring to his own merits ("I have found favor in Your eyes") and to his own desire for further insight into the ways of God ("...let me know Your ways, and let me know You, that I may find favor...") Indeed, Moshe seems to combine the personal and national requests in an almost awkward manner, appending the words "and behold, this nation is Your people" to his personal prayer for knowledge. Why does Moshe choose to voice his own curiosity in a prayer he is making on behalf of the Jewish people?

Whose People Are We?

It is quite clear that, in his petition, Moshe tries to underscore the status of the Jews as "Hashem's people", a phrase conspicuously absent from the Divine responses. Hashem addresses Moshe alone, to the exclusion of the Israelites, whereas Moshe insists on including them in the discussion. Sensing this dissonance, Moshe then shifts to the phraseology of "I and Your people", drawing attention to the nation of Israel together with himself. What exactly is the significance of these nuances? How can they deepen our understanding of the exchange between Moshe and God?

A Reenactment of The Revelation

Immediately after the brief dialogue, Moshe receives new instructions:

"And Hashem said to Moshe, 'Carve for yourself two stone tablets like the first ones, and I will inscribe on the tablets the words that were on the first tablets which you shattered. And be prepared in the morning, and you shall ascend in the morning upon Mount Sinai, and you will stand there with Me on top of the mountain. No man shall go up with you, nor shall any man appear on the entire mountain; neither shall flock or cattle graze opposite the mountain...'"

Apparently, Moshe's prayer has been answered. Hashem now directs him as to the way in which the covenant, torn asunder by the worship of the Golden Calf, will be reestablished. The solution is for a new revelation to take place at Sinai; however, this time God's communication will be to Moshe alone.

Indeed, the parallels between the description of Moshe's prophetic vision and that of the original event at Sinai are striking. Just as the Jewish people were commanded to "prepare themselves" to stand at the foot of Sinai and receive revelation, and just as they were commanded that neither man nor beast should ascend the mountain, so is Moshe instructed here. Furthermore, just as the first revelation was memorialized in the Two Tablets that were smashed, so too will this revelation be memorialized in the new Tablets that will be engraved by Hashem.

At the same time, though, this will be a private affair between Moshe and Hashem. Thunder and lightening will be absent, and the Ten Commandments will not be reiterated. This time around, it will be Moshe, and not Hashem, who will provide the Tablets for the inscription. Of course, the similarities and the contrasts between Moshe's encounter with God and the revelation experienced by the Nation of Israel must be accounted for. Why did Hashem see fit to put Moshe through this unusual ordeal? If the events at Sinai must be reenacted for the covenant to be renewed, why is the reenactment only a partial one?

In the next passage, the Torah tells us:

"And Moshe carved two tablets like the first ones, and Moshe rose early in the morning and ascended Mount Sinai, as Hashem had commanded him. And he took the two tablets of stone with him. And Hashem descended in a cloud and stood with him there, and Hashem called out in the Name. And Hashem passed before him, and called out 'Hashem, Hashem, God, Merciful and Gracious, Patient and Abundant in Kindness and Truth; Preserver of Kindness for thousands of generations, bearing iniquity, rebellion and unintentional sin, and cleansing - but He does not cleanse completely - visiting the iniquity of parents upon children and children's children, to the third and fourth generation.'"

And Moshe hastened to lower himself to the ground and bow. And he said, "If now I have found favor in Your eyes, O' Lord, then may the Lord go among us - for it is a stiff necked people, and forgive our iniquity and unintentional sin, and make us Your heritage."

And He [Hashem] said, "Behold, I seal a covenant: Before your entire people I shall do wonders, that have never been created on earth or among the nations, and the entire people among whom you dwell will see the deeds of Hashem - which are awesome - that I will do with you."

Two aspects of this event are especially worthy of note. The first is the connection being made between Moshe's prophetic insight and the Jews' atonement. To begin with, Moshe is told to ascend the mountain

with new tablets in hand - a clear indication that the prophetic experience he is about to have will somehow affect reconciliation between Hashem and the Jewish people. Indeed, immediately upon grasping the knowledge that Hashem has presented to him, Moshe requests forgiveness for the Nation, and, at least on the surface, it seems to be granted. The link between Moshe's personal intellectual growth and the status of the nation was first mentioned in Moshe's initial prayer, and resurfaces here. What is the precise nature of their relationship? How does one affect the other?

Second, Moshe here returns to his emphasis on the Jews' covenantal bond to God, referring to them as "Hashem's people". Here, though, rather than ignore this phraseology, Hashem meets Moshe halfway, referring to the Children of Israel as "The people among whom you dwell". In some sense, the Jewish nation has regained its coveted position in God's eyes, but it is not entirely clear how this has been accomplished.

The Parasha proceeds to rehash, almost word for word, the commandments recorded already in Parashat Mishpatim. These commandments were relayed to the Jews immediately after the Revelation at Sinai. The implication is clear - through Moshe's "reliving" of the Sinai experience, the covenant has been restored, and these mitzvot "reintroduced" to affirm it. Can we explain the exact mechanism by which the covenant has been resurrected, and what significance the details of the process have for us?

Vicarious Providence Saves the Day

In order to answer the aforementioned questions, we must put the events of Parashat Ki Tissa into a broader theological context. From the moment that the Torah was given, the Jews' worthiness of Divine Providence became a function of their adherence to the Divine commandments. Through their observance of the mitzvot they demonstrated a commitment to their covenant with Hashem, and He, in turn, blessed and protected them. Once the Israelites engaged in idolatry, though, they effectively terminated their special relationship with God. In an instant, they ceased to be the people of Hashem and became the people of Moshe, of their human leader ("Go down, for your people, whom you brought out of Egypt, has become corrupt"). Of course, Hashem would still fulfill His commitment to the Patriarchs and would bring their descendants into the land of Israel to inherit it. But this did not necessitate the continued existence of the Children of Israel. It would have been sufficient to preserve Moshe - the last remaining individual worthy of Hashem's particular Providence who happens also to be a descendant of Avraham, Yitschak and Yaaqov himself - to ensure that the promise to the forefathers would be kept.

Recognizing the problem and wanting to his people to be spared from its consequences, Moshe pleads for

(continued on next page)

their salvation ("Your people whom You took out of Egypt"). Nevertheless, Hashem makes abundantly clear that, from now on, His concern and intervention will only relate to Moshe due to the his profound knowledge and exceptional character. His relationship to the Jewish people as a collective, on the other hand, will be indirect at best ("behold, My angel will go before you, for I shall not go up with you...").

In this context, we can better understand Moshe's approach to his dialogue with Hashem. If he can create a circumstance in which his personal worthiness is inherently linked to the people's merit, then Hashem's providence will extend to them as well. Thus, he emphasizes "I and Your people", drawing attention to the fact that he is a member of the nation of Israel, and that his identity and destiny is intrinsically wrapped up with theirs. To deal with him is to deal with them.

A Second Sinai Restructuring the Covenant

It sounds noble, but how can Moshe actually achieve his goal of enmeshing himself with the people of Israel? The strategy he pursues is quite remarkable. Moshe realizes that the special relationship with God that he enjoys is rooted in his knowledge of God ("Let me know You, so that I shall find favor in Your eyes"). Thus, in order to accomplish his objective of reuniting the Jews with God, he must attain an insight into Hashem's wisdom that is so revolutionary and profound that it will become the unique intellectual legacy of the Jewish nation. Through transferring his knowledge to the Children of Israel, he could presumably transfer his merit to them as well. Their acquisition of the content of Moshe's epiphany will give them the boost that they need to regain Hashem's favor.

The original covenant forged at Sinai was based on the observance of God's commandments and was violated egregiously. But the covenant between Moshe and Hashem is a covenant of definite individual knowledge rather than precarious national commitment. The radically new understanding that Moshe received at Sinai became the intellectual inheritance of his people and formed the basis on which the covenant could be reset. Although not every Jew can grasp the full implications of what Moshe learned, the prophecy is vouchsafed to us as the people of God, to study and attempt to comprehend it to the extent of our ability. We may not, through our own merit, have the right to be called "Hashem's people", but we will always be the nation "among whom Moshe dwells."

The truth is that, even today, our behavior often falls short of the expectations represented by the first covenant at Sinai. But the second covenant at Sinai, mediated by Moshe who carved the tablets with his own two hands, is rooted not in our behavior alone, but in our function as the vehicle of Torat Moshe. It

provides something we can fall back on, even when we have strayed far from the mitzvot and are only beginning our process of return to Hashem.

Incidentally, we can see from here that Hashem does not operate in an arbitrary manner in His dealings with mankind. Were Moshe not to have found a valid pretext for the re-extension of God's Providence to us, it would not have happened. Hashem doesn't play favorites; He interacts with human beings according to their merit. To expect a special relationship with Hashem just because one is Jewish is a reflection of profound arrogance. This is why, in the course of the dialogue with Moshe, Hashem states, "I will show grace to whomever I will show grace, and I will show mercy to whomever I show mercy." In other words, if one does not qualify for grace or mercy, there is no room to maneuver.

This explains another perplexing statement of our Sages. They tell us that Moshe, when he said "And we will be distinct - I and Your people - from all the peoples on the face of the earth", was in fact asking Hashem to restrict the gift of prophecy to the Jewish people. The philosopher Spinoza ridiculed this Midrashic statement, averring that a modest and truly perfected man like Moshe would never have made such a petty and selfish request.

However, understood in its proper context, this petition is perfectly sensible. Moshe's objective was to establish the Jewish people as humanity's conduit to knowledge of Hashem, by conveying to them the foundations of true Metaphysics and Theology that he learned. But how would this unique status be manifest to the nations of the world? What concrete form would it take? The answer is that the Jews' exclusive possession of accurate prophecy would support their claim to authentic knowledge of God, and thus establish their credibility in the eyes of the nations. Of course, the prophets are expected to share their knowledge with the entire human race. But no prophet could arise outside of the framework of the revelation vouchsafed to Moshe. This revelation, the key to true understanding of Hashem, is our heritage as a people.

The Thirteen Attributes Ratifying The Covenant of Knowledge

This is why the Rabbis tell us that, when the Jewish people sin, they should recite the Thirteen Attributes and are guaranteed forgiveness. Most people desire a relationship with God based upon their own merits. They nurture a fantasy that, despite the imperfection of their personalities and conduct, they deserve Hashem's particular attention. When we begin to evaluate ourselves on the High Holidays, it becomes apparent that our addiction to material things is just too powerful, our attraction to the fleeting and temporal is too overwhelming, and our ideal picture of ourselves too unrealistic. Like our ancestors, the vast majority of our energies gravitate to some Golden

Calf or another. Even the teshuva we do - necessary and precious as it is - only scratches the surface of the areas in which we must improve. Thus, we are forced to humbly recognize that we cannot offer any "justification" for our receipt of God's continued providential care. Our continued existence as the people of Hashem is not based upon our own spiritual achievements, but is predicated on the fact that we represent the legacy of Moshe, the man of God.

The saving grace of the Nation of Israel is its identity as the people to whom Moshe bequeathed true knowledge of Hashem. Recitation of the Thirteen Attributes represents our acknowledgment of this fact; even as we repent and rededicate ourselves to serving Hashem, we freely admit that we do not "deserve" His assistance because of our own accomplishments. Some individuals may indeed merit Divine intervention by virtue of their knowledge and piety, but we cannot claim to have this merit collectively. Simply stated, our specialness as a nation is due to the fact that we are the bearers of the crowning vision of the greatest of all prophets. The Tanach promises us repeatedly that, in Messianic times, the nations of the world will ask us to guide them toward a genuine understanding of the Ways of Hashem. Our role in the world as the "carriers" of this body of knowledge will then be universally recognized.

This approach can also shed light on an enigmatic Selicha prayer found exclusively in the Sephardic tradition. This piyut, or liturgical poem, is known as "Bedil Vayaavor", "for the sake of, or on account of 'and He passed'". It includes a litany of petitions - ex., for long life, spiritual enlightenment, etc. - after each of which we say "on account of 'and He passed.'" The reference of "and He passed" is to the revelation Moshe received on Mount Sinai, "And Hashem passed before him, etc."

On the surface, asking for something on account of the revelation Moshe received seems absurd. We didn't experience the breakthrough that he did, so why should it be considered a merit for us? The discussion presented here can explain it beautifully. The prayer is emphasizing that our own worthiness is lacking, but the fact that we possess the keys to comprehending the ways of Hashem - namely, the content of the revelation communicated to Moshe - provides us with a lasting source of distinction and merit.

I hope that this exposition serves to deepen our understanding and appreciation of the High Holiday prayers. I believe that it also demonstrates how much can be learned and clarified from a careful reading of the Torah's text alone. When studied properly, the Written Torah reveals much more to us, than most people give credit. ■

*Courtesy of Rabbi Joshua Maroof's blog:
<http://vesomsechel.blogspot.com>*

Letters



Letters

from our

READERS



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

Believe it or Not

Aurora: I have noticed there is so much disagreement among different rabbis, it is so strange to me, I some times get very stressed and I decided not to go out of Mesora until I learn more from you. Mesora gives me peace and happiness, when I go outside I get very confused and some times I don't see the wisdom I expect.

Yesterday I wrote one post on the discussion forum, maybe it was a little bit informal; some times I would like to talk about my experiences and to talk about my feelings, I see that on the discussion forum everyone talks about knowledge and interpretation of writings or Torah. You said we have to use our intelligence. I want to know from you if the conclusions that we arrive at, from our experiences of real life, have always to be confronted with Torah, and how can I do it.

Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim: Aurora, when I said "we have to use our intelligence", I was speaking in terms of philosophy, where law does not govern. As a wise Rabbi taught, in philosophy - not practical law - we have only our minds, and no one can tell us what we believe. Torah can tell us what we are to "do" in practice. But we cannot be told to "believe" something we do not. That is an impossibility, and the Torah does not demand the impossible. And you should not be alarmed that there are any views within Judaism, just as you accept there are many religions. Man errs, and many people necessitate many opinions...of course, only one can be truly accurate on any give topic. So this is why we must use our intelligence, to choose for ourselves. We are responsible for our own lives, and therefore, we must select what complies with our own reasoning. You are not obligated to follow any Rabbi on matters of philosophy, if you deem a view as violating reason. The Rabbis teach that at one point in Jewish history, there were no conflicting opinions. Subsequently, man was not as diligent in his studies, so arguments arose.

So remain confident that there is only one truth in any and all areas, but it is man's inadequacies that create alternative views.

I would add, that although the Rabbis argue, do not look down upon them, and I am not implying that you do. For we do not know why some Rabbis held incorrect opinions...perhaps due to errors of predecessors, perhaps their own errors. But it is futile to judge them, as we see they earnestly strove for accuracy. We must appreciate their intent and devotion, regardless of our disagreement with their outcome. Ramban argued on Maimonides many times, but yet, held Maimonides in the highest regard.

Finally, the way we test our ideas against Torah, is by continued study: the more we know, the more our minds will be perfected through Torah. To answer your last question, "yes": our conclusions regarding religious life must comply with Torah concepts: God knows absolute truth, and gave us a Torah to educate ourselves on that religious truth. But in matters of law, not philosophy, our conclusions cannot override the Torah law. So if we arrive at a conclusion that differs from Torah, we must follow Torah. ■

No Kidding

Adam: I work in a center, and I would like to submit a few questions that a young child had. This young boy's name is Jake, he is 7 years old, and he lives in New York City.

His questions follow:

1. How do we know God exists? 2. What does God look like? 3. If people a long time ago "knew"

that many gods existed, like the god of love and the god of beauty, how do we know there is only one God today?

Other children in the program asked these questions: 4. If God exists, why doesn't He communicate with us? 5. When I asked God for something, why doesn't He answer me? 6. Will God hurt me if I do bad things?

Pretty good questions from 7-year-olds!

Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim: Great questions Adam...please tell Jake and the others. I'll address each in order:

1. "How do we know God exists?"

Jake: We know God exists, since nothing can create itself. Something else must have created all we see. And if asked, "Did God need to be created?" then we are back to the same question: "Who or what created God?" I answer as follows: We cannot go back in time forever, suggesting that there was always something that created the last thing. For example, we cannot say that Z was created by Y, and Y was created by X, and X was created by W...all the way back with no end. For if we say that, we never arrive at an actual "cause" for the universe, and this cannot be, since we see the universe! There must be an original, first Cause...which we call "God". This is not an easy question, or answer, so think about this.

2. "What does God look like?" Well Jake, I think we only ask this, because most of what we are used to has an appearance; everything has shape, color, size and other physical features. But aren't there things called "feelings"? We know that happiness and anger are real, we feel them...but we can't see them: we only see happy and angry "people". Feelings are not things we can see. So even though we can't see something, we know it is real, and it exists. This proves that things can exist, even if they cannot be seen. So with eyesight, we know some things exist; with hearing we know other things are real; and with our minds, we know even more things are real...even without seeing them. God is also like happiness. Even though we cannot see Him, because He is not a "physical" thing like a planet, we still know He exists, since we have proof. What's the proof? The first answer! So God is something we cannot see, and He has no appearance. But we know He is real because we figured it out with our minds. Using your mind, you will be able to figure out so many answers to your questions. That is how the great scientists figured out answers...just by asking their questions, and thinking, while studying more and more about the universe. The answers are out there; we just have to ask the right questions to find them. That's what my Rabbi taught me. And he is right.

3. "How do we know there is only one God?"

Jake, People long ago did not "know" there were many gods, they only "thought" so. And that

(continued on next page)

(continued from page 11)

Letters

thought was one of the worst mistakes people made...and they made this mistake because they did not try to "prove" whether it was really true. Back then; many countries were led to accept things that a few foolish people thought were true. They believed in devils, sea monsters, ghosts, and witches. Why did people think these were true? This is because many people are scared about what they don't know. They are scared about death, about what will happen tomorrow, and many other things. Then, some tricky people who liked to be in charge said, "I know what will happen tomorrow", or, "I know how to talk to the dead". Now, since people wanted to know about tomorrow and about what happened to their dead relatives, they "believed" these people...who really knew nothing. These people who wanted to be in charge may have also asked for money to tell the others.

This is something that still goes on today. On television, there is a man called John Edwards, he has a show called "Crossing Over". He lies to other people who miss their dead relatives, saying that he can talk to them...but he can't. But these people who listen to John Edwards don't ask for proof, but they just accept that what John Edwards says is true. They accept his words, because they have a strong wish to do so, not because he is right. But a smart person will only accept what is proven. Smart people don't think that because they want to believe something, that "believing" makes it true. I may want to "believe" I am the nicest person in the world, but since I have no proof, I cannot say that I am right. So do not accept anything as truth, until it is proven.

The way you know something is proven, is if it makes as much sense as $2+2=4$. That you know is true, and nobody can change your mind about that...right? So do the same with everything else you hear or learn: don't accept that something is true, unless it makes clear sense to your mind, like $2+2=4$.

But we must also not follow the ways of the people in the past, who were scared or worried about what will happen tomorrow, or who wanted to talk to the dead. The dead cannot talk, so that is useless. And we should also not worry about what will happen tomorrow, because we each have the ability to make our lives great. So instead of worrying, we should really think about what we want to do in life, make sure it will bring us happiness, and then we should make a plan, and follow it. This way, we are in control of our lives, and we don't need anyone else to tell us what will happen, since they don't know anyway!

And think about this: if John Edwards knows the future, why doesn't he ever win the lottery?! Great questions Jake! Thank you. Now for the questions from the other students...

4. "Why doesn't God communicate with us?"

Well, who says He doesn't? All we know is that He isn't communicating with "you or me". But we know from the Torah that God communicated with many people...as long as they lived an intelligent and kind life. He may be communicating with somebody right now, but since he is a modest person, he does not talk about it.

5. "Why doesn't God answer me?"

God doesn't always answer people when they ask for things, because many times what people want, is not good for them. But God may have answered you even though He didn't talk to you. For example, some second-grader may have asked God to make his sick mother healthy, and even though she is still sick, God may have already sent a cure that takes a long time to heal her. Or, you may have asked God for something He does not do, like to "show Himself to you". This is something God won't do, because He cannot be seen. Additionally, that question has already been answered! What do I mean? I mean that God created the Earth with so much science and math and beauty...all so we can learn that "Something" created the world. So we may want God to do something in one way, but He already did it in another way! We have to keep studying the world to learn more about how God works. You should know that the smartest people in the world, like Albert Einstein, did not need God to "show Himself", because Einstein "saw" God in the amazing laws of nature. This means he knew proofs that God exists, just by studying nature. This is exactly what God wants: that we discover Him through the method of study. This is exactly why God created you and me with intelligence, and no other creature has it; not animals, plants, rocks or anything. God's plan is that by us using our minds, we will come to learn more and more answers to our questions.

6. "Will God hurt me if I do bad things?"

God will not hurt us if we do bad things. God made the world in a way that if we do bad things like stealing or murder, that we will see the bad that we did, as others will cry. We should stop doing what is bad because it hurts others, and it hurts ourselves. God is very wise, and built the world with a system that teaches us lessons, without Him doing anything more. When God made the world, He knew that many people would make mistakes, so He made the world with "lessons" built inside it, because He loves us and doesn't want us to keep doing what is bad. Another example is a person who spends all his money on buying cars, and not feeding his children or helping the poor. He will soon see all his cars become old and rusty, or he will become tired of the same old cars, and he will not want to buy cars anymore. He will think what he really should do with his money. He will also hear his children crying for food. So God does not have to do anything to

teach us. He already made metal so it rusts, and He made people become tired of the same things. He did this so we stop spending our money and our time on things that don't matter, and start doing things that really matter, and make the world a better place.

One more example is food. Even though food is important, many people don't know when to stop eating. So instead of people eating until they hurt themselves really bad, God made in every person a feeling of "fullness". God teaches us not to eat so much, by making us stop eating by making this feeling of fullness in our stomachs. Everywhere we look, we see that God planned the world, our bodies and our feelings with "messages"! So God doesn't have to answer each our individual requests, since He already made the world answer them for us...all we have to do is learn how to find the answers! But God did answer many wise people, like Moses, Elijah and others, since they were the smartest people, and asked questions that maybe could not be found in the world. If we get as smart as they were, God will answer us too.

Jake, I hope you, Adam, and the other students will send me more questions soon. Goodbye for now. ■

-Rabbi Moshe

Lucky 13

Aurora: I want to tell you my experience about superstition: I am an analyst programmer. About 2 years ago I was, for the last time in my life, superstitious! I have never been that much of a superstitious person, but some times I would take "precautions" as the popular saying, "I don't believe in witches, but I don't doubt they can fly".

Returning to the story...it was Friday evening, I had to insert information about a new procedure in a data repository. I had to choose a new group number to associate to this process (since the current group number had arrived to its maximum number of the procedure that could belong to that group). There was one problem, the next number was 13, I had a hesitation, and I said to myself, "Help! 13? No!" and I decided to use number 14 for "prudence". Well guess what!? Monday Morning at my arrival I found out all the processes had stopped; this due to the fact that the number of the groups had to be consecutive otherwise the scheduler would go crazy (I didn't know at the moment about this limitation). I had to work very hard to put everything going and it was not the worst, the worst was that I had to say the real reason to my boss!

I learned for sure never to be superstitious anymore, even a little bit!. As one friend of mine said to me once, "Being superstitious brings very bad luck" ...I confirm!

-My modest intelligence arrived through sufferance to what Torah teaches in His wisdom. ■

Advertising



Speak to a designer
1.888.523.1999

The finest in handcrafted and completely custom antique lighting reproductions.



Mention this ad and save an additional 10%
www.customlightingfixtures.com



Ph: 516.792.0200

Fx: 516.792.9503

JL@JLichter.com

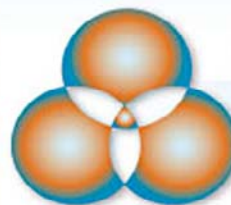
Law Office of Joseph E. Lichter

Real Estate Closings Contracts
Leases Wills Estate Planning

Let Us Brighten Your Smile!



Join our dental family
and we will treat you with
an **UNEXPECTED** difference
in **AFFORDABLE** dental care.



**Tri Boro
DENTAL**

Heshy Roth, DDS & Associates

Call For Your Convenient Appointment!

718-327-7000

SE HABLA ESPANOL

Located in Far Rockaway, NY – Also serving the Five Towns

Manage Your Finances Wisely:

- Understand & control finances.
- Invest for your child's education.
- Create emergency funds.
- Plan for your child's wedding.
- Build a diversified portfolio.
- Make a budget and stick to it.

Everyone dreams of the day they will retire. Make sure you are financially ready for those golden years. We provide comprehensive assistance. Or, if you are self directed, we can simply look over your shoulder to make sure you are on the right path. Contact us today: arif@fortunefinancialadvisors.com

FortuneFinancialAdvisors 718-327-8294

HomeTech

All Home Improvements / Metro NY & LI

**Pressure Cleaning, Staining, and Sealing of
Decks, Concrete, Siding and Brick
Deck Construction / Repair / Brick, Trim
Tile Work / Painting**

WEB: NYDesign.com/HomeTech
Email: HomeTech@NYDesign.com

516.668.3224