

ESTD  
1997

We do not preoccupy ourselves with the next world, for we know not what it is. And such preoccupation removes us from the true good: Torah study. It is only he or she who comes to a great joy in their study, that this world and the next will be a source of real happiness. Therefore, fulfill your obligation in this life studying Torah and creation. For it is the true good here, and the source of eternal life.

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

# JewishTimes

Volume VI, No. 3...Nov. 3, 2006

WWW.MESORA.ORG/JEWISHTIMES

Download and Print Free

## IN THIS ISSUE

PARSHA: LECH LECHA	1-3
LOSING THE NEXT WORLD	1, 4
LETTERS	5, 6
PARSHA: RICH & FAMOUS	7
SCIENCE EARTH'S AXIS	8
PARSHA: PROVIDENCE	9, 10

## SUPPORT THE JEWISHTIMES

EDUCATING 1000S WORLDWIDE



WWW.MESORA.ORG/DONATE

## CANDLE LIGHTING 11/3

Boston	4:18	Moscow	4:28
Chicago	4:25	New York	4:32
Cleveland	5:02	Paris	5:09
Detroit	5:06	Philadelphia	4:38
Houston	5:16	Phoenix	5:17
Jerusalem	4:30	Pittsburgh	4:57
Johannesburg	6:07	Seattle	4:32
Los Angeles	4:41	Sydney	7:05
London	4:12	Tokyo	4:27
Miami	5:20	Toronto	4:49
Montreal	4:21	Washington DC	4:48

## Weekly Parsha

# Lech Lecha

RABBI BERNARD FOX

“And He said unto him: Take for Me a heifer of three years old, and a she-goat of three years old, and a ram of three years old, and a turtle-dove, and a young pigeon.” (Beresheit 15:9)

Our parasha describes the devel-

*(continued on next page)*

# LOSING THE NEXT WORLD

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

Chapter 11 of Talmud Sanhedrin (90a) discusses the topic of the Next World, “Olam Haba”. We are taught that all Jews possess a share in the afterlife...with some exclusion: those who profess that Resurrection is false, or that Torah is not divinely given, and an Apikores.

There is a debate between the Talmud and Maimonides regarding the definition of an Apikores. The Talmud's definition is either one who embarrasses a Torah scholar, or one who embarrasses his friend in front of such a scholar. Maimonides defines an Apikores as either one who denies prophecy, or denies Moses' prophecy, or he denies God's knowledge of human affairs. These two opinions are quite divergent, and additionally, we are surprised that Maimonides argues on

*(continued on page 4)*



(Lech Lecha 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](mailto: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](mailto: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.

opment of the relationship between Hashem and Avraham. In the opening passages of the parasha, Hashem tells Avraham that he will enjoy His providence. However, despite the influence of Hashem's providence, Avraham and Sara do not have children. This leads to a dialogue between Hashem and Avraham. Again, Hashem tells Avraham he has earned great merit and He will protect him. Avraham responds that this merit is of little value to him. He has no heir. Hashem tells Avraham that he will have an heir and that his descendants will be as numerous as the stars. Avraham accepts Hashem's message. Then, Hashem tells Avraham his descendants will occupy Canaan. Avraham asks, "In what will I know?" In other words, he seems to ask Hashem for an additional indication that his descendants will occupy Canaan.

Our passage introduces Hashem's response to this last question. Hashem instructs Avraham in the Brit ben HaBetarim – the Covenant of the Halves. The instructions for the creation of this covenant are unusual. Avraham is to take various animals. Most are to be split in half. Two birds are to be included among the animals. The birds are not to be split and are to be placed at the beginning and end of the series of split animals. Avraham follows the directions. He arranges the animals and the birds as required. Then, Avraham sees a bird of prey descend upon the dead animals. He chases it away.

The incident of the Brit ben HaBetarim ends with a further prophecy. Hashem tells Avraham that his descendants will be afflicted for four hundred years in a foreign land. They will leave with the wealth of their tormentors and conquer Canaan. The prophecy ends with

a flame passing between the halves of the animals.

The Brit ben HaBetarim is not easily understood. It raises a number of questions. One of the obvious problems is that Avraham's responses to the various messages that Hashem communicated seem inconsistent. It seems that Avraham was comfortable with, and willing to immediately accept the prophecy that he would have an heir and that his

descendants would be as numerous as the stars of the heavens. However, Avraham seems to have been less certain of the significance of the message that his descendants would inherit the Land of Canaan. Why was Avraham less certain of the meaning of this second message?

Rabbaynu Ovadia Sforno addresses this question. In order to understand Sforno's response to this question, a brief introduction will be helpful. Maimonides explains that the Torah provides us with a method by which we can determine the credibility of any prophet. In order for us to accept that a claimant is a true prophet, we assess the accuracy of his prophecies. Every prophecy that the claimant communicates must be fulfilled. If all of the claimant's predictions

become reality, then we are required to assume that the claimant is an authentic prophet. If, at some point, the assumed prophet offers a prediction that is not fulfilled, then we must assume that this person is a false prophet.

Maimonides adds two significant qualifications to this rule. First, he explains that the requirement of absolute accuracy only applies to the positive predictions enunciated by the claimant. However, if the claimant warns of disaster or tragedy and this prediction does not materialize, we do not assume that the claim-



(continued on next page)

ant is a false prophet. We recognize that a prediction of disaster is intended as a warning to repent. We know that repentance and forgiveness are always possible. We must acknowledge that the fulfillment of the prediction of disaster may have been forestalled by repentance and forgiveness. Therefore, although the claimant must be absolutely accurate in his prediction of positive outcomes and events, inaccuracies in predictions of tragedy and disaster are not of consequence. Such inaccuracies do not undermine the credibility of the claimant.

Second, it is important to recognize that there are two types of prophecy. Some prophecies are designed for communication to others. In such instances, the prophets serve as Hashem's spokesman to humanity, or to a group or nation. Other prophecies are personal. In these prophecies, the prophet receives information from Hashem for his own benefit. These prophecies are not intended to be communicated to others. Maimonides explains that the requirement for absolute accuracy only applies to prophecies intended for communication to the public. The public must have a means by which to determine the credibility of the claimant. The means is the accuracy of the claimant's predictions. However, the true prophet himself knows that he is communicating with Hashem. He does not need proof as to the veracity of his prophecy. Therefore, it is possible that some personal prophecies will not be fulfilled.

This seems somewhat bizarre! We can understand why negative prophecies may not be fulfilled. As Maimonides explained, it is possible that through repentance and forgiveness disaster was averted. However, how is it possible that Hashem will communicate a personal prophecy to the prophet and He will not fulfill this prophecy?

Maimonides offers an amazing answer based on the comments of our Sages. Our Sages explain that it is possible that a subsequent sin or wrongdoing will invalidate the prophecy. In other words, Hashem may communicate to the prophet that he will receive a specific reward. This communication is not a guarantee that this reward will be granted. The granting of the blessing or reward remains dependant upon the righteousness and merit of the prophet. If the prophet is deserving, he will experience the fulfillment of the prophecy. However, if he sins, he may be deprived of the predicted blessing.[1]

As an aside, it is worth noting that Maimonides provides a clear basis for differentiating between true prophets and counterfeits. Throughout the generations, various

individuals have claimed or implied prophetic powers. Such a claim is not substantiated simply because some, or even many of this claimant's predictions seem to have been fulfilled. The claimant must be unerring in his predictions. Even a single positive prediction that goes unfulfilled completely undermines any possible claim of authentic prophecy.

Based on Maimonides' analysis, Sforno explains Avraham's differing reactions to these two prophecies. First, Sforno assumes that Avraham understood that both of these communications were personal prophecies. They were not intended for communication to his followers. Hashem communicated the future to Avraham for his own benefit. Avraham concluded that these communications were not absolute assurances. Like all personal prophecies, their fulfillment would depend upon the righteousness of the beneficiaries of these blessings. He understood that Hashem's message that he would have children, and that his descendants would be as numerous as the stars, depended upon his own continued righteousness and merit. He accepted this responsibility upon himself without hesitation. However, the message that his descendants would possess the Land of Canaan seemed problematic to Avraham. How could he know that his descendants would follow in his path and merit this reward? Avraham expressed his uncertainty regarding the certainty of this outcome.

Based on this interpretation of Avraham's question, Sforno offers a novel explanation of Hashem's response. He asserts that any prophecy that is accompanied by a promise or brit – a covenant – must be fulfilled. Therefore, the brit that Hashem entered into with Avraham provided a definite assurance that the prophecy would come true.[2]

It is possible that Sforno maintains – that by definition – a covenant is a public declaration. Any prophecy that is accompanied by a covenant rises above the level of a personal prophecy. A covenant is an objective and public declaration. It is no longer dependant upon the merit of the beneficiary of the recipient of the blessing. The covenant must be fulfilled.

There is some evidence that this is Sforno's understanding of the significance of a covenant. In other words, further comments seem to indicate that Sforno understood a covenant as a public declaration, and not just the affirmation of a personal prophecy.

Sforno is bothered by another problem presented by the Brit ben HeBetarim. As noted above, one of the final elements of the brit was a prophecy regarding the future

persecution of Bnai Yisrael. Hashem told Avraham that his descendants would experience four hundred years of affliction and exile. This was a revelation of the eventual exile of Bnai Yisrael to Egypt and their persecution at the hands of the Egyptians. Hashem also revealed to Avraham that Bnai Yisrael's tormentors would be punished. Bnai Yisrael would be redeemed from this exile and would leave the land of their persecution with great wealth. Why was this revelation necessary, and how is it related to Hashem's covenant with Avraham?

Sforno explains that Hashem foretold Avraham of the suffering of his descendants in a foreign land for a specific reason. During their suffering, they would question the credibility of Avraham's prophecy that they would possess the Land of Canaan. They would wonder how their suffering could be reconciled with the promises that their forefather, Avraham, had communicated to them. In order to respond to this inevitable question, Hashem revealed the exile and suffering to Avraham. Avraham was to share this revelation with his children, and through them his descendants. This revelation made clear that this suffering was envisioned by Hashem when He made His promises to Avraham. Therefore, it was clearly not a contradiction to those promises.[3]

These comments indicate that Avraham was expected to communicate the prophecy that his descendants would possess the Land of Canaan to his children, and through them to Bnai Yisrael. With the addition of the covenantal element to the prophecy, the message was no longer personal. It became a public declaration for future generations. This necessitated the additional revelation of future exile and persecution. Once the message was transformed into a public prophecy, this additional element – the prophecy of exile and persecution – became essential. ■

[1] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Commentary on the Mishne, Introducton.

[2] Rabbaynu Ovadia Sforno, Commentary on Sefer Beresheit, 15:6-9.

[3] Rabbaynu Ovadia Sforno, Commentary on Sefer Beresheit, 15:13.



(Next World continued from page 1)

## Perfection

the Talmud, which is authoritative. Let us first understand both sides, and then proceed to address the argument. We must then understand why according to either view does one sacrifice his eternal life. What is the severity of the violation according to both views?

According to the Talmud, the common denominator is the Torah scholar; either a person embarrasses 'him', or he embarrasses his friend in front of the scholar. What is the common denominator? It appears that in both cases, the sinner views the Torah scholar in the incorrect light. For one to embarrass a scholar, his view of Torah must be severely distorted, to the point, that he looks down upon those who teach Torah, and degrades them. And if one embarrasses his friend, but in front of the scholar, what is the crime? I believe the error here is that the sinner again incorrectly views the scholar, and renders him as 'utilitarian'. To the sinner, the scholar is but a means to his own ego gratification. He attempts to embarrass another human being, in an attempt to escalate his own self-image. This is the source of all degradation, and Lashon Hara. A person who speaks Lashon Hara, or verbally attacks others is bothered to some degree by the person he attacks. He feels threatened, and to eradicate his sense of inadequacy, he verbally assassinates the person he 'imagines' surpasses him. The crime, according to both definitions of this Apikores, is the incorrect view of a Torah scholar.

According to Maimonides, an Apikores violates Torah life in a different realm: the intellectual. Maimonides defines the Apikores as one who denies the relationship between God and man: he denies prophecy, and God's knowledge of human affairs. These are Torah fundamentals, upon which, the belief in the divinity of the Torah, and in Reward and Punishment are suspended. For without prophecy, God did communicate His Torah to mankind, and without God's knowledge of human affairs, Reward and Punishment cannot exist. These ideas form Maimonides 13 Principles, principles that must be agreed to if one is to partake in the nation of Israel, and live eternally.

The difference between these two opinions appears to boil down to either a) a crime in character, or b) a crime in thought: man's two essential faculties. Man is created as a thinking being, which also possesses emotions that contribute to his character. It appears from this argument, that man can corrupt himself in two methods: he can follow ego emotions to the point that he despises God's favored Torah scholars, or he can deny truths. In either case, the sinner has corrupted his understanding of God's will for man: that he lives a Torah life, where our Torah study is God's will. Such an individual cannot partake of eternal life, for that life is based on our

conviction that Torah knowledge is supreme, and nothing else shares its status.

When one speaks poorly of others, in front of a scholar, he views the scholar as a means to his ego satisfaction, and not properly, as a person who has achieved great knowledge of God. He seeks to defame his peer in front of the scholar, minimizing the scholar's essence to merely a "social status", since the sinner utilizes the scholar for his social agenda. And since his view of Torah knowledge is surpassed by his need for ego satisfaction, he has not reached the level where he views knowledge on the highest plane. The afterlife, Olam Haba, is available only to those who truly place knowledge on the highest plane. As a Rabbi once mentioned, it is in Olam Haba that our greatest Torah knowledge is obtained.

However, Maimonides does not completely omit embarrassing others from causing one to forfeit Olam Haba. In his Laws of Repentance (3:14) Maimonides classifies one who embarrasses others – on a regular basis – as one who also forfeits Olam Haba. Although he also defines this sin as a "lesser" sin than Apikores, one nonetheless forfeits Olam Haba through 'regular' violation of degrading others. What is Maimonides' formulation, that he reduces the Talmud's case as a "lesser" sin? Why does preoccupation with degrading others forfeit one's Olam Haba, whereas a single act does not, as is the case when one denies prophecy or God's knowledge of human affairs?

Perhaps Maimonides is not in that much disagreement with the Talmud...perhaps he does not disagree at all! What do I mean?

Maimonides may have read the Talmud's case of Apikores, as an "example" of an underlying corruption. According to Maimonides, perhaps his read of the Talmud was not that "only one who degrades his fellow" is an Apikores. Maimonides may have learned that case, as an example of one whose relationship to Torah is broken, to the point, that he distorts the Torah scholar, or his friend in front of the scholar. According to Maimonides, the true, underlying corruption of the Apikores must be one of "intellect", for this is man's highest element. Only when man corrupts his thoughts concerning the Creator, does he forfeit Olam Haba. Therefore, a single violation of Lashon Hara does not define how the person views God: it may due to a momentary, emotional outburst. But such an outburst does not equate with one who always speaks against his fellow. In this latter case, he has ascribed to a philosophy in which he lives each day. He expresses a value system, which is truly part of himself, part of his thinking. Here, Maimonides agrees, one forfeits his Olam Haba, but not for a single occurrence. Repeated violating display a corrupt outlook.

We may suggest that Maimonides concurs with

the Talmud: an Apikores is one who has corrupted his thoughts of God. The Talmud measured this in man's value system, expressed in degrading a Torah scholar. For such degradation unveils the underlying view of Torah, given by God. Maimonides' formulation defines the Talmud's example: an Apikores is one who denies prophecy and God's relationship to man. The Talmud describes the example, whereas Maimonides defines the intellectual error.

With this knowledge, we must take great care to reexamine our own thoughts of God: are they correctly inline with the Torah's words, and the teachings of the Rabbis? Are we forfeiting our eternal lives, in place of momentary ego gratification? ■

**Funding for small to medium sized, private or public companies.**

**Private Transactions  
Reverse Mergers  
Block Trades  
Convertibles  
Stockloans  
Shells  
Pipes  
IPOs**

**Salamon Brothers**

**516.371.9440**

**salamon.brothers@verizon.net**

## Letters



# Letters

*from our*

## READERS



**Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim:** These verses point to the innate, sinful nature of man. Having been created with instincts, man will sin, but he can repent. God deemed it necessary that man possess instincts, but to be used in His service. Invariably, man's emotions will get the best of him. But with continued strides, man can remove himself more and more from sin, until he perfects himself.

The Talmud (Sabbath 55b) discusses the fact that four men died due to the counsel of the snake. But all others die of their own sin. These four men were sinless. However, death was still "fitting" for them, in a manner. This is a different idea of "original sin". This means that Adam and Eve demonstrated that man's nature required mortality as a response. Their sin is in fact representative of the shortcomings of all humans. Due to their sin, God deemed mortality a necessary response, for the good of all men and women. Even if one does not sin, as these four, death is still necessary for man's well-being. For without death, man eludes himself of his imagined greatness. This leads man to rebellion. In order that all future generations are deterred from erring as Adam and Eve, God rendered man mortal.

We are not "paying the price" for their sin, as understood by other religions. For the Torah openly states God's justice: "Each man in his own sin shall die". (Deut. 24:16) The reason we must die is because primordial man demonstrated this human need for mortality, they were the prime example of what all humans are, and need. God

made mortality so, as a good for all humans. But God would not make man mortal, until he displayed this need, even though God knew man would sin. God does only what is necessary. This is a foundation of God's attributes. Only once man sins, does God create the remedy. Causing man to be mortal before he displayed any need for mortality would be an injustice. ■

### Consistent Reasoning

**Reader:** Dear Rabbi, Thank you for your lengthy answer in Jewish Times. It did help me a lot. But I am still troubled by some of the factual conflicts between the Torah and reality. For example, the Universe is clearly much, much older than 5767 years. I understand this can be reconciled with Genesis. But there is a much stronger question: The Flood! A global flood that wiped out all living things just 4000 years ago is impossible. We know of communities that have been in continuous existence for 10 or even 30 thousand years, like the Chinese. So some say that it was only a local flood in Mesopotamia. But it would have had to be much earlier than Noah lived, based on the archaeological record of those areas.

Moreover, many of the places supposedly founded by Noah's children were in existence long before!!! How can we get around this problem? I have seen discussions of it on blogs, and the internet. But none have satisfied me. I looked at one of the blogs you have quoted in the past, but the rabbi there had a very strange approach that is hard to accept.

What is the answer to this dilemma? Should I deny my mind?

*Thank you, Jonathan*

**Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim:** You should ask yourself why you accept an account of 30,000 year old civilizations, over accounts of the Torah. Why do you deem those more credible? What is your basis of reasoning? ■

### Original Sin?

**Reader:** Rabbi, I am Noachide and I wonder if you can clarify a couple of verses for me concerning the x-ian doctrine of "original sin". Apparently I am being held responsible for something that happened 5000+ years ago. There is no mention of original sin anywhere in the Tanakh that I can readily discern, however a few of my x-ian friends indicate two verses they say 'implies' the doctrine of original sin.

Psalms 51:7

"Indeed I was born with iniquity; with sin my mother conceived me"

Job 14:4

"Who can produce a clean thing out of an unclean one? No one!"

I am nowhere near an Orthodox Jewish community, and have to rely on the Internet to stave off unrelenting x-ians. I am still nurturing my logic and reasoning skills and would appreciate any instruction you can give me.

*Thank you, Rodney*

# Letters

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

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

(continued on next page)



(continued from previous page)

## Letters

## Gentiles and Torah

**Reader:** Dear Rabbi, I've just joined the Mesora.org Discussions under the screen name NoahideTruth. I have enjoyed the Jewish Times articles and the ones on the site. I have a question though:

As far as my understanding goes, the Torah is not just the 613 commandments that were given to Israel. Based on this truth, what is meant by the study of Torah being off limits to B'nai Noah? As an observant individual, you are well aware that the 7 Laws are the foundation of the Law of God given to Moses. The differences are obvious in the commandments, but the foundation embodied is the same.

I think when Rabbis say that the Noahides can't study Torah that they should say, "They can't study the 613 commandments". This is more precise on what is meant. I know, and every other Noahide knows, that we are not bound by the Law of God to Moses. But the Torah contains more than just that Law. The 7 Laws are also headings with subheadings much like the first 10 words given at Mt. Sinai. We have to recognize the differences that I think are being overlooked when declaring that Noahides can't study Torah.

Anyway, I just wanted to share this point of view in hopes to know if you agree or disagree on this.

*Humbly, Hiram*

**Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim:** The Torah verse is Deuteronomy 33:4, "Moses commanded us in Torah, an inheritance to the congregation of Jacob." This means that it is the "congregation of Jacob" who is bound to Torah, and no others. But God does not play "favorites", as He created all men and women. How can He not desire the good for everyone, and only offer Torah to the Jew?

The great commentator Nachmanides says the following on this point, "The Rabbis explained, 'congregation' is used here and not 'house of Jacob, or 'seed of Jacob', thereby including all those who yearn to cleave to the Torah. Thus 'congregation' is used to refer to even the convert. Therefore, both Jew and convert are referred to by God as His 'congregation'."

Nachmanides makes it clear that any human being desirous of leading the highest lifestyle as following all 613 commands is welcome, and is in the same footing. One born as "Jew" has no advantage over a convert. The reason Gentiles have but seven commands is not a "limit" to their performances, but a "minimum" requirement to retain a right to life. If a given person

cannot comply with at least these seven Noachide laws, then his life is meaningless.

God's desire that only the Jew study Torah is for good reason. It should be understood why the punishment is so severe, if a gentile learns Torah other than what applies to his seven Noachide Laws. By doing so, the Gentile then blurs the lines of who is a "Torah Authority", and this done en masse, will destroy Torah, as other Gentiles not fit to teach, will proliferate ignorant rulings. Only by the Rabbi/student relationship is the Torah insured from falling into the hands of those without proper training.

It may be very possible that a Gentile has the same intelligence as a Rabbi. Judaism does not make false claims such as "we are more intelligent than others", as I have unfortunately heard from ignorant fellow Jews. There is no difference between a Jewish mind and a Gentile mind, or a Jewish soul and a Gentile soul. However, a Gentile is not bound to fulfill the 613 commands. As such, the level of meticulous Torah study and adherence will probably not be found among Gentiles who study Torah for its theoretic beauty alone.

Perhaps it is the Jews' obligation, which engenders the proper attitude essential for the highest level of Torah study, and thus, Torah leadership. This secures for Jews alone the right to disseminate Torah. I would note that many converts became some of Judaism's greatest teachers. However, to teach Judaism, one must be one of those people who inherited Torah, through "obligatory" Torah study – and this is only the Jew or the convert.

The preservation of the Torah system by the obligated Jew in fact serves both Jew and Gentile. For without such care to accept the Jew's designation as the sole Torah authority, other less informed people would corrupt the Torah system, not enabling a Gentile the opportunity to observe Torah accurately, or convert, according to true Torah law. Additionally, any Gentile desirous of accepting more Torah laws is wise to do so and is fully permitted. For through these additional laws, he or she will become more perfected, as is God's plan for every man and woman. The only laws a Gentile may not observe unless converted, are the Sabbath and Holiday, and I feel Tefillin as well. This is because these laws function to distinguish the Jew from others, as the Torah authority, as we have explained.

The prohibition for Noahides to study Torah, does in fact apply to commands, which he or she is not fulfilling. If however you wish to fulfill additional commands, then you may study them to keep them. A Rabbi also taught that in areas of perfection, a Gentile is allowed to study. ■

# It's here: Mesora's Widget.

News, candle lighting times, the JewishTimes, advertisers' specials, and links to important Jewish causes...right on your desktop. Free!

Download this free, new technology here:  
[www.Mesora.org/DesktopWidget](http://www.Mesora.org/DesktopWidget)

When cutting news breaks, our widget automatically displays summaries, images and links to full stories. When advertisers offer new savings, you will be notified first. We've also placed direct links to your favorite Mesora pages.

Mesora's widget is the first and only widget in the Jewish marketplace. Organizations are invited to contact us for consideration of free widget ads.

To advertise email us: [advertise@Mesora.org](mailto:advertise@Mesora.org)



Businesses interested in your own custom designed widget, please visit [www.DesktopWidgets.org](http://www.DesktopWidgets.org)

[www.DesktopWidgets.org](http://www.DesktopWidgets.org)  
**DesktopWidgets™**

# Lifestyles *of the* Rich *and* Famous

**RABBI JOSHUA MAROOF**

Avram is certainly regarded as a spiritual giant - someone who was willing to sacrifice everything in order to properly serve God. It seems justified to assume that he was not particularly interested in material gain. Yet, when Hashem commanded Avram to set out for the Land of Canaan, he promised him the "American Dream":

And I shall make you a great nation, and I shall bless you and make you famous; and you shall be a man of blessing. And I will bless those who bless you, and he who curses you, I shall curse; and all the families of the Earth shall be blessed through you.

Why did God use fame and fortune to entice Avram to leave his home? Was this really his motivation in heeding the call of prophecy? This doesn't seem to square with anything else that we know about Avram, or about prophets in general.

An examination of the first verse of our Parasha may lead us to a better understanding of Avram's situation:

And Hashem said to Avram: "Go forth from your land, your birthplace and the house of your father, unto the land that I will show you."

Why did Hashem describe Ur Kasdim with three different terms ("land", "birthplace", and "house of your father"). On the surface, this seems superfluous. All of these words refer to the same location!

The fact that Hashem used three terms to identify a single place tells us that there are three different dimensions of the place that were significant to Avram. It was, first of all, his land. He derived part of his sense of political identity and "belonging" from it, in the same way that many of us say "we are American." This experience was a mutual one. Avram had a feeling of connection with the inhabitants of Ur Kasdim, and they felt a connection with him as well.

Second, it was the place where he was born and raised; he was familiar with it. He possessed an understanding of its culture, customs and mores, and was comfortable moving about within it.

Finally, his family lived there. He had social connections in the area and was well known among the people. Avram was by no means a stranger in Ur Kasdim.

Why were all these things so important to Avram? After all, he was not a teenager going away to college for the first time. He was a seventy-five year old man!

We must remember that, since his youth, Avram had dedicated himself to sharing the philosophy of monotheism with as many people as he could. He believed that because he was a member of the community of Ur Kasdim - familiar with its ways and recognized among its citizens - he had a better chance of succeeding in that environment than in any other. If he had been an outsider, he reasoned, the likeli-

hood of his preaching having any influence would have been drastically reduced.

There was another powerful incentive for Avram to remain at home. As long as he was in Ur Kasdim among relatives and neighbors, securing a livelihood was not problematic for him. He had all of the business and familial connections that he needed.

This was a crucial factor insofar as his spiritual mission was concerned. After all, part of what was so impressive about Avram was that, despite his wealth, he was fully devoted to a unique religious outlook and way of life. We witness examples of this phenomenon all the time in the world of commercial advertising. Celebrities, and not homeless men, are the ideal spokespersons for new products. This is because the average person has a natural tendency to respect the views of attractive and successful individuals. We can understand then that, were Avram to become poor, he would risk losing his credibility in the eyes of potential students.

Thus, Avram wasn't interested in the material or social benefits of living at home for their own sake. Nor was he drawn after the fame and fortune that God promised to give him. Rather, he was simply concerned that becoming a wandering, impoverished and anonymous nomad in the Land of Canaan would undermine his efforts to reach out to others.

Hashem therefore informs Avram that he need not worry. He will be blessed with financial success and his reputation will be extolled throughout the land. Avram was assured that the spiritual mission to which he had devoted his life would not be compromised by his departure from Ur Kasdim. ■

The screenshot shows the NYDesign.com website. At the top, there's a navigation bar with links like Home, About Us, Services, Portfolio, and Contact. Below that, a large banner features the company logo and the tagline 'Where Good Design is Smart Business'. A central section highlights 'Free Quote Here' with a gold seal icon. To the right, there's an image of a computer monitor displaying a website. Below the main content, a row of logos for various clients or partners is visible, including A&E, CNN, and others. The footer contains the company name and contact information.

- 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**

# Tilting Towards Torah

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

Maimonides teaches that our love of God is obtained through the study of creation, and Torah. Therefore, the true Torah scholar embraces scientific discovery, and seeks to discover compatible and complimentary understandings for both realms of his findings. When confronted with an apparent “contradiction” between the two sciences – Torah and nature – he does not feel satisfied with such a contradiction, since he knows that God created both, and they must be harmonious, by definition. For God cannot have one plan – Torah – that contradicts His “other” plan – the universe. Additionally, when studying natural law, the Torah scholar will not stop there, but he will seek to understand how God’s universe plays a role in man’s approach to God. Case and point: the Earth’s axis.

The Earth rotates at about 1000 mph on an axis tipped over 23.5° from vertical. This axis is responsible for the changes in temperature experienced during our various seasons. It is also responsible for the length and brevity of our days and nights. Due to this axis: during summer, certain locations experience shorter nights; and during winter, shorter days. Figure “A” refers to New York and Israel – on roughly equal latitudes – displaying the increased duration in daylight during summer, and the increased duration in shade, during winter. But this does not explain temperature differences.

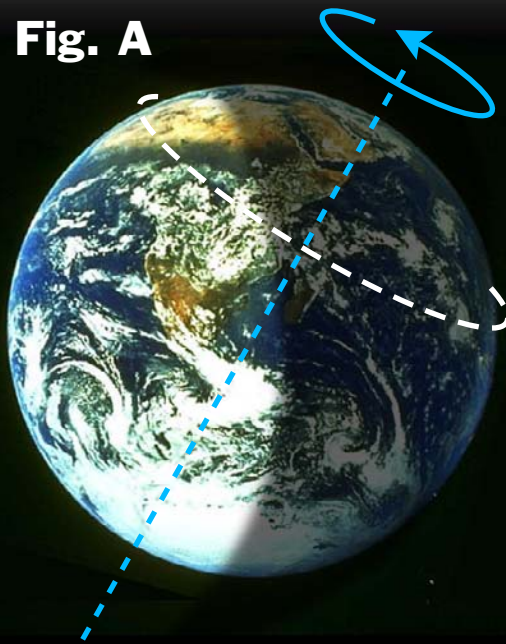
At least two reasons contribute to our change in climate: 1) the angle of the sun’s rays which cause indi-

rect exposure to the sun, and 2) the amount of the Earth’s atmosphere through which sunlight must travel to reach us. Elongated sunrays do not concentrate the sun’s heat, but dissipate it over a larger land mass. This results in cooler temperatures. This is similar to our youthful activity of burning leaves with a magnifying glass: when highly concentrated, the sun’s rays ignite the leaves; but when widened, the sunray carries less heat. Additionally, when sunlight travels through a greater amount of the atmosphere, it is that much more diluted. We thereby experience less heat.

But as a student of Torah, we may rightfully ask how the change in daylight hours is a boon to our Torah lifestyle. My suggestion is as follows: man must procure food. To do so, God offers us appropriate weather and abundant sunlight during the summer, so we may work the fields, and so the sun may cause growth. However, food is a “means” to a life of Torah. Therefore, when ample food has been procured, God offers us an incentive to stay indoors where we may study His Torah: He diminishes daylight, and creates not so favorable outdoor weather. We are thereby less distracted with outdoor labor, and less in need of working the fields. Additionally, daylight causes man to feel ambitious, while nighttime produces a greater state of calm, a necessary backdrop for study.

We may suggest that this axis is not an end, but in fact, targets the greater good of Torah study. ■

Fig. A



## Winter on Earth:

The blue line represents Earth’s axis.  
The white line is the latitude and rotation path of NY and Israel.  
The majority of time, these locations experience darkness in winter due to the Earth’s axis.



# God's Providence: Two Arenas

RABBI ISRAEL CHAIT

*Transcribed by student*

Maimonides states in his Laws of Idolatry that Abraham was quite young (some suggest three years of age) when he started recognizing God, and pondering His existence. Having worshipped idols himself, but then realizing the contradictions in such practices, Abraham was yet a youth, considering these matters day and night. Over time, he realized the idolaters were gravely mistaken.

Then, Abraham wrote responses to the idolaters and debated with them, but not until he was 40. Although possessing far greater knowledge then they had possessed, for decades, Abraham abstained from entering into debates with others until he fully concluded his thinking process, and attained clarity on the issues he pondered. Maimonides teaches that a poor answer is worse than no answer at all. Influencing people thru truth requires the educator to give over an entire subject matter: a conclusive series of arguments. To effectively present a "system" of truths, an incomplete or poor presentation mars the appreciation intended for the student – the goal is forfeited, and even worse, the student assumes the teacher to possess a flawed system. This would greatly decrease or perhaps even remove the student's ability to ever recognize this system at a later date. The student would thereby suffer the greatest loss: he would never come to an appreciation for the Creator, and His system of knowledge and providence over mankind. Therefore, Abraham patiently studied all

matters until he attained crystallized concepts. Only then did he venture out into society, and take on the idolatrous cultures with well-formulated responses, only attained over decades of analysis driven by his yearning to know truth.

Two times in his life, did Abraham engage in debate: 1) in Ur Kasdim, and 2) in Charan. Charan was a major platform. He went from kingdom to kingdom, and called in God's name in many cities. Abraham dealt with others on an individual basis, offering them arguments against their corrupt philosophies: each person according to his own, subjective level. He also wrote many books addressing the flawed views these cultures defended.

However, Abraham's real success was not in Ur or even in Charan. He only succeeded in attracting his 10,000's of followers once God's providence stepped in. Abraham's philosophy continued thru Isaac, until it was almost lost by the time the Jews left Egypt.

Each morning we recite the blessing of "Sanctifying God's name":

"You are the one (who existed) while the world was not yet created. You are the one from when the world was created. You are the one in this world, and You are the one in the world to come. Sanctify Your name by those who sanctify Your name, and sanctify Your name in Your world. And with Your salvation, raise up, and exalt our horn. Blessed are You, God, who sanctifies His name publicly."

This blessing reiterates the truth, that the Jews are the people given the task to sanctify God's great name. But it is only through His providence that we may do so. We learn this from the Torah's omission of Abraham's initial successes prior to God's intervention, and we learn this from Revelation at Sinai. It was this Sinaic event where God's providence intervened in human affairs, directing the descendants of Abraham to study and observe His Torah, and educate the world on His existence, His Oneness, and His truths.

## Maimonides: Only Certain Individuals Knew God

Noah's son Shem recognized and taught about God. Shem established a house of study in B'aire L'chai Roh-ee. We learn when the twins (Jacob and Esau) violently wrestled within Rebecca, that Rebecca went to the study hall of Shem to gain some insight as to why her

pregnancy deviated from the norm. What was Rebecca intent on learning? Why did she go here specifically? Upon Eliezer's successful return from locating a wife for Isaac, the Torah tells us that Isaac too was returning from B'aire L'chai Roh-ee. What Isaac was doing there?

Previously, when Hagar fled from before Sarah, she named the well where the angel appeared, "B'aire L'chai Roh-ee". We now arrive at the initial event, from which we may derive the significance attributed to this place. What is this significance?

## B'aire L'chai Roh-ee – God's Providence over Individuals

Rashi states that Hagar had witnessed God's providence while in Abraham's house. But now exiled, she never expected to see providence outside of Abraham's house. Hagar, as an individual, no longer comprised Abraham's mission and was surprised to witness an angel of God, i.e., God's providence. (Gen. 16:7) Hagar named that God who spoke to her at the well, "The God Who sees." (Gen. 16:13) The Torah explains why she gave this name, "[13] ...for she said, 'for also further I see, after I have seen'. [14] Therefore the well was named, 'The Well of the Living One Who is Seen.'" Hagar states that she saw God's providence "again". After having seen it Abraham's house, Hagar again witnessed God's providence via His angels. What is the lesson?

Yonasan ben Uzziel explained the name of this place as, "One Who sees, but is not seen." What does this name mean? Hagar's naming of this place on account of a new providential event teach this: "You are the One who has true existence. Here was revealed the providence of God." Hagar praised God. She admitted of the idea that no human knows when providence will take place. She assumed providence was limited to Abraham's mission. But now, Hagar recognized that His providence provides for every "individual". She experienced God's intervention, His providence, even away from Abraham's house. Providence for God's mission for Abraham to establish the Jewish nation was not the only type of providence. Thus, Hagar identified two distinct roles in which God's providence relates to man, 1) providence for mankind (Abraham establishing a nation, and 2) providence for individuals. The idea Hagar spoke of, "He sees but isn't seen", refers to providence outside Abraham's mission, that is, "How God's providence extends to every individual."

*(continued on next page)*

(continued from previous page)

## Weekly Parsha

Simultaneously, Hagar demonstrated through her very surprise at God's intervention that man cannot know when and where God's providence will step in. In contrast, most people incorrectly feel they "know" when God is in their lives. But as Yonasan ben Uzziel explained, the name means "One Who sees, but is not seen." "Is not seen" means that man cannot predict God's methods of providence.

Isaac too came from B'aire L'chai Roh-ee, where Shem was. Shem's house of study was established precisely in this location, as this was the goal of Shem's study hall: to study God's providence for individuals. Shem's study hall embodied the truth uttered by Hagar. Therefore he established his study hall in the very place where Hagar had expressed this very truth.

Why did Rebecca go to Shem's study hall? As we stated, Shem taught about God's provi-

dence for individuals. Rebecca didn't think her pregnancy was anything more than a personal crisis, not on par with God's mission for Abraham and Isaac to establish the Jewish nation. Therefore she sought understanding about her "individual" case: she felt it was a personal and private problem. However, it was then revealed to her through prophecy that her pregnancy was not a personal matter. Her abnormal pregnancy was an act of God's providence over the nation, not the individual.

Both Isaac and Jacob learned at Shem's study hall. Why? To fulfill their roles as forefathers of the Jewish nation, they required knowledge of God's providence for the individual. To pass on to Israel the traditions and teachings of Abraham, this "individual providence" was required learning. Abraham's knowledge concerned providence for mankind, while Shem's knowledge centered on individual providence.



We learn that on his journey from his home to his uncle Laban, Jacob lodged at Shem's study hall for 14 years. This teaches that Jacob required 14 years of knowledge of God's providence over individuals, so as to become the establisher of the tribes. This level of knowledge was acquired at Shem. Only then, did the providence relate to Jacob to establish the tribes. Such a long duration of study teaches that God's methods of providence require long and deep study. The patriarchs all required a level of in-depth study, in order to accomplish their goals: this study was "God's Providence to individuals."

It was asked, "Why did Isaac have to spend so many years in blindness?"

The answer was "to give the blessing to Jacob" So why could he not be temporarily blind? We must appreciate that God's providence is not a simple matter. For some reason, Isaac required this degree of blindness. If Isaac had a condition that led to his blindness, and God did not remove it, it was necessary for God's plan. It was not a punishment, as it says, "To give the blessing to Jacob". But we may investigate this matter further.

Moses did not lose his vision. (Deut. 34:7) He knew that beyond a certain point, he could not know. This is the meaning of "...and Moses hid his face" (Exod. 3:6) stated in connection with his encounter with the burning bush. Because of this, Moses merited to attain the highest level of prophecy ever experienced. Moses understood when a matter that was greater than his abilities. However, Isaac tried to understand that which was beyond his abilities. When Abraham was about to sacrifice Isaac, Isaac pondered how God could first tell Abraham "For in Isaac will your seed be called", and then Abraham should be commanded to kill Isaac. Isaac sought an understanding for this contradiction in God's words.

The Medrash states that Isaac's blindness was due to the angel's tears falling into Isaac's eyes as he was bound on the altar. How do we understand this Medrash? The angels represent "ultimate knowledge". Their "tears falling into Isaac's eyes" metaphorically alludes to something greater than Isaac (angels) causing a negative (blindness) in Isaac. Thus, Isaac's very attempt to overextend his inquiry into areas greater than his abilities had a negative effect on him. He became blinded. God's initial promise of Isaac being a successor would not come to be. This knowledge affected Isaac, i.e., blindness. However, this very blindness helped direct Isaac to review his act, and repent from trying to gain knowledge, which surpassed his abilities. Another Medrash also teaches that Isaac lacked the knowledge concerning how the providence over Abraham works.

We learn that God designed two types of providence, 1) providence over mankind, and 2) providence over the individual. Hagar understood that God granted His providence over Abraham for the sake of mankind. But Hagar was then exiled from Abraham's house. She did not assume she would experience providence, unless connected somehow with God's influence over mankind. After experiencing God's intervention at the well, Hagar now learned of this second type of providence. ■



## Advertising



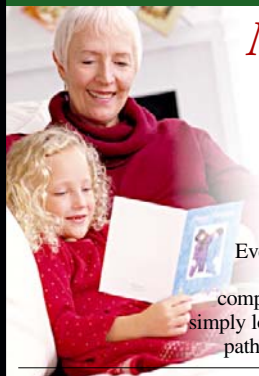
Speak to a designer  
1.888.523.1999

The finest in handcrafted and completely custom antique lighting reproductions.



Mention this ad and save an additional 10%

[www.customlightingfixtures.com](http://www.customlightingfixtures.com)



### 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](mailto: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](http://NYDesign.com/HomeTech)  
Email: [HomeTech@NYDesign.com](mailto:HomeTech@NYDesign.com)

**516.668.3224**



Ph: 516.792.0200

Fx: 516.792.9503

[JL@JLichter.com](mailto:JL@JLichter.com)

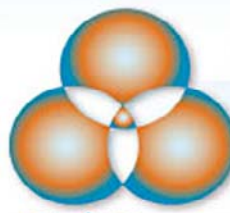
## Law Office of Joseph E. Lichter

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

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

Call For Your Convenient Appointment!

**718-327-7000**

**SE HABLA ESPANOL**