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Weekly Parsha

Vayeshev

RABBI BERNARD FOX

"And they said to him, "We have dreamed a dream, and there is no interpreter for it." Joseph said to them, "Don't interpretations belong to God? Tell [them] to me now." (Beresheit 40:8)

Our parasha describes the deterio-

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Chanukah

RABBI BERNARD FOX

“During the Second Temple period, the Hellenist kings made decrees against the Jewish people, suppressed their religion, did not allow them to learn Torah or to perform mitzvot, seized their money and daughters, entered the Temple and broke down its walls, and defiled the objects of purity. And, they greatly afflicted the Jewish people and oppressed them tremendously until the G-d of their fathers had mercy upon them, provided salvation and saved them from their hands. And the house of the Hashmonaim – High Priests – triumphed over them, killed them and provided the Jewish people with salvation from their hands. And they established a king from among

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Chanukah & Temple

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

There are a few instances in Jewish history concerning the building and rededication of the Temple. They include David's desire to build the first Temple; Zerubabel's rebuilding of the second Temple; and the rededication of the Temple during Channukah. There is an underlying theme, which permeates all three cases. Let us review a previous lesson concerning the first Temple.

Samuel II, 7:1-17

[1] And it was as the king dwelled in his house, and God gave him respite from all around, from all of his enemies. [2] And the king said to Nathan the prophet, “See how I dwell and a house of cedar and the ark of God dwells inside of curtains.” [3] And Nathan said to the king, “All that is in your heart do, for God is with you.”

[4] And it was on that night, and it was that the word of God was to Nathan saying; [5] "Go and say to David saying, 'So says God; Will you indeed build me a house that I will dwell? [6] For I have not dwelled in a house since the day I

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*In three cases, man
was prevented from
building or re-
dedicating the Temple.
God insured all cases were
performed by Him.
Why?*

(Vayeshev cont. from pg. 1)

Weekly Parsha

JewishTimes

Weekly Journal on Jewish Thought



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ration of the relationship between Yosef and his brothers. Eventually, the brothers conspire to sell Yosef into servitude. Yosef is sold to Potifar – one of Paroh's ministers. In Egypt, Yosef experiences successes and disappointments. By the end of the parasha, Yosef has been imprisoned. But, even in prison, Yosef's talents and virtues are recognized. The affairs of the prison and the care of the inmates are entrusted to him.

Among the prisoners are Paroh's former Cupbearer – his Chief Butler – and his Chief Baker. Paroh has sentenced both to prison as punishment for their carelessness. One night, both have dreams. Each senses that his dream has some significance, but neither can understand the meaning of his dream. Both are seized with distress over the potential portents of their dreams. Yosef senses that his two celebrity prisoners are upset, and inquires as to the cause. They explain to him that they have each had a disturbing dream and that neither can unravel the meaning of his dream. Yosef suggests that they relate their dreams to him. He tells them that perhaps Hashem will reveal to them their meaning.

“In another three days, Paroh will number you [with the other officers], and he will restore you to your position, and you will place Pharaoh's cup into his hand, according to [your] previous custom, when you were his cupbearer. But, remember me when things go well with you, and please do me a favor and mention me to Paroh, and you will get me out of this house.” (Beresheit 40:13-14)

The Cupbearer accepts Yosef's offer and relates his dream to him. Yosef explains to him that his dream is a portent of redemption. He tells the Cupbearer that the dream indicates that in three days, he will be reappointed to his previous

position. Yosef asks the Cupbearer to remember him and bring his case to Paroh's attention. He hopes that Paroh will recognize that he has been unjustly imprisoned and restore him to freedom.

“But the Cupbearer did not remember Yosef, and he forgot him.” (Beresheit 40:23)

Yosef's plan does not unfold exactly as he plans. The Cupbearer is released from prison and is restored to his position. He has ready and

constant access to Paroh. But, he does not act on Yosef's behalf. Instead, he completely forgets Yosef and his request for aid.

There is a significant dispute among the commentaries regarding this episode. Rashi comments that Yosef had acted improperly in asking the Cupbearer for his assistance. Yosef should not have relied on the assistance of the Cupbearer. Instead, he should have trusted in Hashem. As a consequence of this error, the Cupbearer forgot Yosef. Yosef spent an additional two years in prison.[1]

On the surface, Rashi's comments are difficult to understand. Yosef was provided with an opportunity to save himself through the assistance of Paroh's Cupbearer. Through providing the Cupbearer with a proper interpretation of his dream, Yosef hoped that he would win the friendship of Paroh's

servant, and he expected this grateful Cupbearer to plead his case before the king. This seems like a completely rational plan. Certainly, Hashem expects each of us to strive to achieve our own well-being. We are not permitted to simply rely upon G-d for miraculous salvation. Where was Yosef's iniquity in attempting to help himself?

While we are required to do everything in our power to help ourselves, we must concurrently recognize that our efforts alone are not sufficient to secure happiness and success. Only if our actions are accompanied by the favor and grace of



(continued on next page)

(Vayeshev continued from page 2)

Weekly Parsha

Hashem will we secure positive results. Yosef apparently believed that through his wisdom alone he would be redeemed. He felt he had devised a brilliant plan through which his individual efforts would secure his freedom. He envisioned the grateful Cupbearer returning to Paroh, pleading Yosef's case before his master. Paroh would investigate the charges against Yosef and recognize his innocence. He would then intervene to correct the injustice that Yosef had experienced. The process would be gradual, but would inevitably culminate in Yosef's freedom.

No individual controls his or her environment. We are affected by a multitude of factors, few of which are under our control. Yosef's error was in failing to recognize that, despite the brilliance of his plan, success could not be achieved without the assistance and benevolence of Hashem.

Gershonides disagrees with Rashi's position. He maintains that Yosef acted properly. He does not attribute to Yosef any lack of trust in Hashem. He explains that the Cupbearer's failure to recall Yosef's kindness was not a punishment. It was a reward! Yosef had hoped that the Cupbearer would immediately bring his case to Paroh. Had the Cupbearer acted as Yosef planned, he might very well have failed to secure Paroh's sympathy. However, two years later, Paroh had his own disturbing dream. The Cupbearer suddenly recalled Yosef's assistance in interpreting his dream. He related his experience with Yosef to Paroh. Paroh summoned Yosef at a moment in which he was desperately in need of the assistance that Yosef could provide. Yosef was able to provide Paroh with an interpretation of his dream. Paroh recognized Yosef's wisdom and appointed him as his Prime Minister. This outcome would not have been achieved if the Cupbearer had appealed to Paroh on Yosef's behalf at an earlier time.[2]

However, Yosef's interaction with the Cupbearer presents an interesting problem. Yosef believed that the Cupbearer would be grateful for his help and would intercede with Paroh on his behalf. Yosef's premise was that the Cupbearer would recognize that he had assisted him in some manner. What exactly was the assistance that Yosef provided to the Cupbearer? It is true that Yosef had provided a proper interpretation of the dream. But, the dream was only a revelation of the Cupbearer's fate. Yosef's interpretation did not influence this fate. He did alleviate the Cupbearer's anxiety. But, it is unlikely that Yosef believed that because he had relieved his anxiety, the Cupbearer would feel remarkably indebted to him.

A comment of Rabbaynu Avraham ibn Ezra may help resolve this issue. Before Yosef provided the Cupbearer with an interpretation of

his dream, he explained that the interpretation he would provide would be from Hashem. What message was Yosef relating? Ibn Ezra explains that Yosef did not want the Cupbearer or the Chief Baker to believe that his interpretation would, in some way, influence their fates. He was telling them that their fates were already determined. Hashem was merely revealing their destinies.[3]

Apparently, Yosef was concerned with this issue. He feared that the Cupbearer and the Chief Baker believed that his interpretation would actually influence their destiny. A positive interpretation would secure a positive future, but a negative interpretation would bring about personal disaster. In other words, Yosef feared that they would not recognize that his role was that of a passive interpreter and that his interpretation would not actually influence their fates.

"Now the Chief Baker saw that he had interpreted well. So he said to Yosef, 'Me too! In my dream, behold, there were three wicker baskets on my head.'" (Beresheit 40:16)

Yosef interprets the dream of the Cupbearer. He tells him that his dream foretells his deliverance from prison and his restoration to his previous post. Upon hearing this interpretation, the Chief Baker asks Yosef to interpret his dream. However, the passage adds that the Chief Baker observed that Yosef had interpreted the Cupbearer's dream well. Only then does he ask Yosef to interpret his dream. This translation is consistent with Unkelus' interpretation of the passage. However, Rabbaynu Saadia disagrees with this interpretation of the passage. He suggests that the Chief Baker did not decide to

share his dream with Yosef because he found his interpretation of the Cupbearer's dream compelling. Instead, he revealed his dream to Yosef because he observed that Yosef had interpreted the Cupbearer's dream as a positive portent.[4] This interpretation suggests that the Chief Baker believed that Yosef's interpretation of the Cupbearer's dream was not merely a revelation. He believed that Yosef's interpretation would influence future events. Therefore, once he observed that Yosef had provided a positive interpretation for the dream of the Cupbearer, he was encouraged to reveal his own dream to Yosef.

This may explain Yosef's plan. Yosef had told the Cupbearer and the Chief Baker that his interpretation would only reveal the future. It would not influence events. However, he also recognized from the behavior of the Chief Baker that they had not necessarily accepted his assertion. He concluded that the Cupbearer may have also believed that his interpretation actually played a role in securing his freedom and restoration. If this were the Cupbearer's belief, then he would feel indebted to Yosef. Therefore, Yosef believed that he could ask the Cupbearer to respond to this perceived act of kindness and press his case with Paroh. ■

[1] Rabbaynu Shlomo ben Yitzchak (Rashi), Commentary on Sefer Beresheit 40:23.

[2] Rabbaynu Levi ben Gershon (Ralbag / Gershonides), Commentary on Sefer Beresheit, (Mosad HaRav Kook, 1994), p 234.

[3] Rabbaynu Avraham ibn Ezra, Commentary on Sefer Beresheit, 40:8.

[4] Rabbaynu Saadia Gaon, Commentary on Sefer Beresheit, 40:16.



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Chanukah & Temple

took the Children of Israel up from Egypt, and until this day, and I traveled in a tent and a Tabernacle. [7] In all that I traveled, in all the Children of Israel, was the matter ever spoken by Me to even one of the tribes of Israel, of whom I commanded (judges) to herd My people Israel, saying, 'Why have you not built Me a house of cedar?'

[8] And now, so shall you say to my servant David, 'So says the Lord of Hosts, I have taken you from the shepherds' huts, from following after sheep, to become a ruler over my people Israel. [9] And I was with you with all that you went and I cut off all your enemies from before you and I made for you a great name like the name of the great ones that are in the land. [10] And I shall yet establish a place for My people, for Israel, I shall plant it there and it shall dwell in its place so that it shall be disturbed no more; crooked people shall no longer afflict it as in earlier times. [11] And also from the day that I appointed judges over My people Israel, and I shall give you respite from all your enemies; and God informs you that God will make for you a house. [12] When your days will be complete and you will lie with your fathers and I will establish your seed after you that come from your loins and I shall make his kingdom firm. [13] He shall build a house to My name and I will establish his seat of kingdom eternally. [14] I will be to him a father, and he will be to Me a son so when he sins I will chastise him with the rod of men and with afflictions of human beings. [15] But my kindness will not be removed from him as I removed it from Saul, whom I removed before you. [16] Your dynasty and your kingdom will remain steadfast before for all time; your throne will remain firm forever." [17] In accordance with these words and in accord with this vision, so spoke Nathan to David."

The first thing that strikes me is God's use of a rhetorical question, "Will you indeed build me a house that I will dwell? And again in the next verse, "was the matter ever spoken by Me...why have you not built Me a house of cedar?" This is to say that God denounces David's sentiment. God says that He never requested a house of cedar to replace the Tabernacle, making David's sentiment to build a house to God, somehow a wrong idea. When God uses a rhetorical question, He means to indicate that He never requested this Temple, i.e., it is clearly man's wish "and not Mine". However, God says David's son Solomon will build that house. So which is it, wrong or right to build a house? One may simply answer that it was David who could not build the house – the Temple – but Solomon could. So the idea of Temple per se is acceptable, but it is with the 'builder' that God takes issue. We must understand why.

But God goes on in verses 8 and 9, describing how He made David king, and how He made his name great like those famous in the land. Why does God mention this here? What does God's elevation of David have to do with His disagreement that David builds a Temple? We also must understand why David must die, and only then his son will build a Temple. Additionally, what purpose is there in the relationship God describes that He will be a "father" to Solomon, and Solomon will be as His "son"? Was this relationship absent with regards to David? If so, why?

God clearly states that He never requested a house. Simultaneously, He says Solomon will build it. Therefore, the house, or Temple, is not an evil...but simply something God "never requested." Therefore, we cannot understand God to be rebuking David, that Temple is an evil. What then is the rebuke, and I do not mean rebuke in the sense that David sinned, as the Talmud states, David did not sin. I mean rebuke, in the sense that David's proposed building cannot take place for good reason, but not that the reason implies sin. So what is this reason that David cannot build the Temple, but Solomon can? Where do we look for the answer? We look right here...God continued with His response to David through Nathan, describing how He made David a king, and made his name great. Think for a moment...what may this have to do with David building the Temple?

The Temple's Purpose

There is a most primary question, which must be asked before answering our other questions: What is the purpose of the Temple? What did David say? He was bothered that God's ark was housed in simple curtains while he dwelled in a strong, cedar wood home. What was his sentiment? His words are, "See how I dwell and a house of cedar and the ark of God dwells inside of curtains." David equates his dwelling with God's dwelling. Here is another clue.

David meant to say that greater honor was due to God, over himself. He wished to give God's ark greater honor than the simple curtain in which is currently dwelled. But for some reason, God did not approve, at least not that 'David' build this Temple. God says, "Will you indeed build me a house that I will dwell? For I have not dwelled in a house since the day I took the Children of Israel up from Egypt..." God's response focuses on the concept of "dwelling". With His rhetorical words, "Will you indeed build me a house that I will dwell?" I believe God is indicating that David's offer exemplified two errors.

The first error (not sin) is David's attempt to beautify the ark's dwelling. God said, "Was the matter ever spoken by Me to even one of the tribes of Israel...why have you not built Me a house of

cedar?" Meaning, God never asked for something, so man should not attempt any enhancement. God goes on, reminding David of the real truth, "God does good for man" as he cites how He made David so great. Now, just as God bestowed good on David making him so great, this Temple too is "for man", not for God. This is precisely why God reminds David of all the good He bestowed on David; to call to David's mind the real relationship is that God benefits man, and not the reverse. This is the central idea.

While in other areas, the Torah's injunction "Zek Aylee v'Anvayhu" ("This is my God and I will adorn Him") allows man to beautify the commands, God's message here is that one who attempts "enhancement" in relation to Temple alone, is overstepping the line: he misinterprets Temple.

Temple is the one area in Torah where God must initiate change. Perhaps the reason being, that regarding Temple, man may err, feeling he is "offering to God" somehow. Sacrifice, incense and the like are subject to misinterpretation of this kind. However, the opposite is true: Temple is God's gift to man, not man's glorification of God. When we glorify God in Temple, it is for our own good that we concentrate on the proper ideals, and we offer God absolutely nothing. However, David's sentiment was that he should not "dwell" in beautiful cedar wood, while the ark dwells in curtains. He felt that he would be improving the idea of Tabernacle with a Temple, when Temple is in fact for man, and not for God. God reiterates this theme by reminding David that He made David who he is today. It is God who benefited David in the past making him great, and it is God who benefits man in Temple. Perhaps David erred in this matter. We also note that at the very beginning David says to Nathan, "See how I dwell and a house of cedar and the ark of God dwells inside of curtains." It appears David is unsure about building a Temple, and seeks Nathan's counsel. This may teach that David was not certain of his idea at the very outset.

Allowing Error to Surface

Perhaps we may go one step further and suggest that this was the precise sentiment God desired to draw out from David into the open, for David to recognize, and come to terms with. Surely Temple is a good, provided God initiates its activities and enhancements, but God refrained from requesting it of man, until after David had this opportunity to express his thought, and God could respond. Now that David was corrected, Temple may be built, but by David's son. Why his son? Perhaps, since David had the correct idea that Temple should exist, he would impart this to his son who could build it with the proper ideas. And, there was no longer any need to delay its building.

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Chanukah & Temple

"Structure for God": An Oxymoron

But there is a more profound error and lesson here. Improving the Tabernacle into a Temple acceptable to God does not occur structurally alone. Rather, the Temple's very definition as a 'good' depends on it being initiated by God, and not man. What is lacking in Temple when man initiates it, or what is added to Temple when God requests it of man?

It is impossible that man should suggest a structure, without casting the frailties of humans onto that structure. Meaning, once David suggested making a Temple from a more 'durable' cedar and not curtains, for God's "dwelling", he was using 'human terms' for a building that is exclusively identified with God. This may very well explain why the original Tabernacle had no ceiling, as it is not a "dwelling", but a location on which to focus on God. This being the case, such a structure would be marred, had it any semblance of a shelter, which a roof indicates by its very definition. God needs no shelter, He needs no roof, and a structure man envisions, even dedicated to God is inherently flawed. Thus, the original Tabernacle could not possibly have a roof; only curtains covered it. Now, David suggests creating a more permanent "building" of cedar? This violated the very concept of the Tabernacle. The Tabernacle was to remind man of ideas about God. Had the Tabernacle a roof, it would convey an incorrect and heretical idea, that God shares the frail, human need for protection from the elements. Thus, Tabernacle can have no roof. Additionally, if man initiates the idea to create a structure to God, this is equal to suggesting a roof be placed on the Tabernacle. For what difference is there, if I place a roof on the Tabernacle, or create a new structure to God with a roof, now replacing the Tabernacle? There is no difference. Therefore, God refused David's offer to create the Temple. In such a Temple, there would be no way to remove the identity that man conceived it. Thereby, it would eternally reflect man's concept of a "shelter", not true ideas.

It is contrary to the true ideas of God that a building is made to Him, as "building" carries with it the notion that it is for man's purposes; a building is a human structure. However, if God initiates such a structure, as he did with the Tabernacle, then it is no longer "man's" idea of building. In that case, it may look like a shelter, but it is more akin to a museum, which contains prized objects, and does not function to provide a haven for inner dwellers. And when God initiates such a structure, man is then building the structure due to a command, and not any other source in him, traceable to the human frailty requiring shelters. Therefore, Solomon was able to build the Temple, as it was now God's wish, and not David's.

How does this relate to Channukah and Zerubabel's construction of the Temple, which we read on Shabbos/Channukah?

David, Zerubabel and Channukah

The prophet Zechariah, the Haftorah of Shabbos/Channukah, concludes with the words "Not by army, and not by strength, but with My spirit..." This refers to Zerubabel's Temple construction that it would be accomplished, but not through succeeding over the enemies or by human might. Its construction would be achieved by God creating peace under Darius' reign, and this Divine backdrop would enable Zerubabel's successful and easy construction.

On Channukah as well, God created the miracle of the oil again as a lesson that God orchestrated those entire events. That rededication was not accomplished by Macabees, but by God's intervention on behalf of those five sons of Mattisyahu; "and the many [God handed] into the hands of the few"... "the wicked into the hands of the righteous..."

Rededication and building of the Temple require God's involvement, in order that man's fame does not overshadow the true purpose of Temple: "knowledge of God". God's fame must be the exclusive identity of Temple, and in all three cases, God insured this to be so. God did not allow David to be credited with temple; He did not allow Zerubabel to be credited with it; and God insured that Chanukah's rededication was accomplished only through His miraculous intervention.

We should come away with a deeper appreciation for the amazing style and the height of Torah precision. In all three cases, the Torah discloses precise wording that uncovers the underlying messages: messages, which lead to truly happy lives, and truly make sense. If we are discerning, and patient in our studies, "the words will speak to us", as a wise Rabbi once taught.

This is truly the design of the Torah: its messages and lessons run deep, but are available if we approach each area with the appreciation that the words are Divinely written. With careful study under wise Rabbis, we too will see these lessons.

God's Torah "words" must be our focus in Torah study...in contrast to many classes, which seek to startle ignorant Jews with mystical fabrications. God did not seek to teach mankind using mystical, and inexplicable stories. Too many Jews miss out on learning "how" to learn Torah, because too many classes seek large audiences, which they lure with eye-stopping lecture titles, and with fantastic stories which the educators themselves cannot explain. What good is it to render Judaism into a religion like the others, where metaphors are taught as literal fact, and where incomprehensible mysticism overrules sensible thought? The Rabbis spoke against this type of an approach, since such classes teach nothing that engenders any appreciation for God's wisdom. All these classes do is dupe the attendees into believing that the lecturer is superior to them, since he can quote matters they cannot comprehend.

But should not a class leave its attendees with "greater" knowledge? If you attend such classes, cease from doing so, for it is a grave waste of your time. It matters none if such a teacher is called "Rabbi". It is the path of reason that we are to follow, not reputations, since this is the only distinction we possess over animals. Believing magical and fantastic stories, is akin to a dog believing his master will feed him...no intelligence is required. But God gave us each the Tzelem Elokim, "intellect". Failing to engage your intellect, you fail in what you owe your Creator, and are judged for this, as Rabbi Bachya states in his intro to "Duties of the Heart".

God did not formulate His Torah to astound people with inexplicable and grand stories. God taught us a system that makes sense. His system opens our eyes and minds to matters that resonate truth within us. And the Talmudic Sages clearly warned in numerous cases not to understand metaphor as literal, and not to even approach such areas, until one has mastered the basics. Can you open a Talmud and explain Tosfos and Rashi? Can you make sense of Talmudic argumentation? Can you explain a series of verses in any area of the Five Books, Prophets, or Writings? If not, then seek a teacher who can train you in the basics. And decades later once you have reached a level of proficiency, again, seek a Rabbi who can explain a metaphor like King David, King Solomon, Maimonides, and others who held fast to the true path of Torah...the path that makes sense to human minds.

All other religions are based on belief and blind faith, for they have no proofs to their lies. Judaism offers the indisputable proof of Sinai. Judaism is supposed to be different, where we do not simply accept anything that anyone teaches. But where our commands are viewed by the other nations as "righteous statutes" as God said in Deuteronomy.

Why is the Torah written so cryptically? Well, if it were not, then our knowledge would end with the final chapters of each work. But since God's wisdom is infinite, and He desires our lives to be led from birth through death by wisdom, He designed the Torah to yield new insights throughout our lives. Weaving the Torah's words with His wisdom, in a cryptic but rational manner, God did not only give us words, but also the "keys" to unlock far greater wisdom. As we learn truths and uncover the methods of God's instruction, our minds become sharper, and we become more independent in our studies. The appreciation of God's unlimited knowledge is essential, if we are to be fueled to seek further insights. And the acquired, Torah thinking patterns and Talmudic reasonings are essential, if we are to understand the truths God embedded in His Torah.

Channukah celebrates God's salvation and the reestablishment of a Torah culture. This culture is one of intelligence. This should be your path, and these reasons alone should be the basis of your Channukah celebration. ■

Letters



Letters

from our

READERS



Idolatry I

Reader: Dear Rabbi, I wish to thank you again for your work on Mesora.org. As you can see, I've written to you before, and though it's taken me some years, I believe I've assimilated the ideas that I rationally knew to be true, but emotionally somehow fought. I think you described the phenomenon perfectly in one reply to a reader, when you wrote that what matters is an objective search of the truth, rather than proving yourself to have been right. Would that everyone could debate this way, and would that I could act in this spirit all the time.

Now, I have a further question, or questions: Is Christianity idolatry? In two different issues of Jewish Times (numbers 114 and 196), two different answers are given. In the former, Christianity is described as being "undoubtedly idolatry",

while in the latter, Rav Chajes' view that neither Christianity nor Islam is strictly speaking idolatry. I understand that Christianity is not a unitary concept, that there are significant divergences in how Christians define their faith. Could it be that depending on how one believes in Christianity, that it may or may not be idolatry?

*Best regards,
Philippe Stephenson*

Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim: You asked if one's "belief" would define what is idolatry. However, it is not a subjective "belief", but the "objective position" which define a phenomenon in a certain manner. As such, Christianity's position of God becoming man could not be further from the truth, and there could not be a worse, or more heretical opinion, that God shares anything with His creations. I do not know what Rav Chajes' understanding was regarding Christianity, nor did I quote him. I believe that was Rabbi Fox, but again, this does not reflect Rabbi Fox's view.

The Hebrew word for idolatry is "avodah zarah" or "strange worship". Now, since idolatry is defined as "the belief in any power other than God", or "alien" or "strange worship", Christianity is then certainly idolatry. Therefore, any belief in God worship, which deviates from the Torah, must fall under the heading of foreign worship, or idolatry. It matters little whether I believe God to be a rock, a tree, or if His worship is through séances or burning children in fire. An error concerning "what" God is, or "how" He is to be worshipped can render one as an idolater, once he performs worship in these strange manners.

It is or course far worse to have a false notion of "what" God is, than "how" He is to be worshipped. However, when someone believes that God is to be worshipped by praying to Jesus, then his view of God must be equally corrupt. ■

Idolatry II

Reader: I have several questions concerning (in one way or another) the Rambam's views on idolatry:

1) How is it possible that one transgresses this prohibition if he considers the possibility, saying, "Perhaps the Torah is not from Heaven" (Laws of Idolatry 2:3)?

Aren't we obligated to establish the principles of the Torah based on proof, and intellectual investigation? And doesn't all intellectual investigation of the validity of a certain idea, by necessity, involve leaving that idea in doubt until it is verified? And if you say that prior to intellectual verification, we must not leave that idea in doubt, but rather,

believe in it until we prove it -- isn't that considered faith? Basically: if one is to live his life by not fully accepting the beliefs of the Torah until he verifies them with his intellect, isn't it inevitable that he'll violate this transgression?

Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim: You are quoting a law written by Maimonides' (Idolatry, 2:3) which says the following: "...And not idolatry alone is it that we are forbidden to turn afterwards in thought, but all thoughts which cause a man to uproot a fundamental of the Torah's fundamentals, we are warned not to entertain on our hearts, and remove our knowledge towards it, and consider, and be drawn after the imaginations of the heart..." Maimonides continues, "And if all men were drawn after the thoughts of their hearts, we would find the world would be destroyed, because of his (man's) weakness of knowledge."

"Imaginations of the heart" and "thoughts of the heart" are what Maimonides rightfully classifies under idolatrous prohibitions. He does not say we must not study rationally. Of course man must hold false notions until his rational studies eventuate in true knowledge, stripping him of erroneous opinions. This must happen to each member of mankind. There is no escaping this, as you stated. But the prohibition here is to follow "imaginations", not rational study. Our minds were given for the very purpose of rational study. We must involve ourselves in analytical thinking as much as possible: this is Torah. What we must not do is follow idle speculation, which, without Torah guidance towards truth, will lead us to believe the baseless, emotional inclinations of our hearts. That is the prohibition Maimonides cites.

It is for this reason that Maimonides subsumes this prohibition under his Laws of Idolatry. Idolatry is the very result of man's subjective, emotional imaginations. Both idolatry and imagination are two points along the same path. Idolatry is just a few steps down that path, after man allows himself to sinfully entertain his fantasies as truths.

Maimonides also teaches us that not only are the formalized 'actions' of idolatry prohibited, but even the very thought processes leading to idolatry are equally prohibited.

Man's thoughts and fantasies take on myriads of innumerable forms. Sometimes Jewish law prohibits a discreet form, like eating specific animal species for example. Those acts are prohibited, and eating other animals is not. But sometimes, Jewish law prohibits not the action for itself, but due to its inevitable result of philosophical corruption, as in our case. What is being averted in this case is the result of a philosophically crippled individual who denies fundamentals necessary for the appreciation of God and His Torah. Since there are many paths, which lead to

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Letters

such corruption, and it is impossible to formally numerate and prohibit each man's fantasies, therefore, the category of "idle speculation" is prohibited, not specified thoughts.

So as you say, man must possess doubts until his studies culminate in proofs. For this, man is not considered idolatrous. That blame is only for those who use imagination in place of critical thought. ■

Chanukah & Insecurity

Chaim: Is there a problem with the lighting of Channukah menorahs in public venues?

Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim: There are a number of problems. Although this commandment concerns the publication of the miracles, we are commanded by God not to add or subtract from His Torah, or from the Rabbi's commands. As such, the rabbinic command of lighting Channukah lights is restricted to one's home, and this is based on a concept. Therefore, lighting in a public forum is not the command, and further, it distorts the objective in the clearly defined mitzvah of lighting in our doorways. Additionally, I have heard observant Jews recite the blessing of these lights using God's name, which violates the third of the Ten Commandments: "no to take His name in vain".

I understand the need for Jews to take pride in their religious practice, but not at the cost of distorting the very command. The Prophet Micha states (6:8) "And humbly walk with God". One need not wonder why with the advent of Rockefeller Christmas Trees, that Channukah menorahs took their stand along side them. It is a transparent attempt to literally share the limelight. But as Torah Jews, our actions are to be determined by God's principles, and not by human jealousy. We need not feel second-rate if electronics, towering evergreens, and gift giving beautify Christmas. Our place is not to copy the idolatrous customs, but to educate all mankind away from such deviant practices. Insecurity coupled with ego forces man to seek public displays of his piety, when Micha instructed us in exactly the opposite.

The menorah is restricted to "Nare: Ish u'Bayso", "A light: [for] man and his household". This is the proper, and only format of Channukah lights. Once disconnected from the house, the menorah is no longer a mitzvah. What is the concept behind "A light for man and his household"? Why was this the rabbinic formulation?

Perhaps, as Channukah commemorates the reinstitution of Jewish life, which the enemy wished us to abandon, the family, which is the primary unit of Jewish tradition, was chosen as the vehicle. In other words, with the family lighting at their home, we demonstrate how God protected



the Torah's transmission – the vehicle of transmission. Lights were selected as the form of this mitzvah, since the Temple's Menorah formed the rededication of Temple worship. Inasmuch as we were desirous of remaining firm in God's worship, the celebration is forged around Temple worship, the center of Jewish life.

Displaying a menorah in public arenas distorts the humble life we are commanded by Micha to uphold. It indicates the fallacy of needing societal approval. It lies to all mankind, that private perfection is insufficient. We must protect authentic Torah fundamentals, and not portray Torah as a lifestyle where we are concerned with social approval, or recognition. Perfection is internal. Religious displays arouse the need in others to also fall prey to these insecurities.

What was Micha's lesson? Initially, God reprimanded the Jews; he accused them of being "wearied" by Torah life (ibid 6:3). But weariness does not operate in a vacuum: it is relative. For example, you would not be wearied if your life was at stake, and another person saved your life in exchange for a week's labor. You would be overjoyed in that labor. But if someone were to pay you one dollar for the same work, you would be wearied. Similarly, God tells the Jews that their weariness is unjustified, "I took you up from Egypt, and from the house of slaves I redeemed you" (ibid 6:4). In response, the Jew should feel overjoyed at the relatively simple tasks required by Torah, as Rashi states. But those Jews were haughty, assuming their time was more precious, than to be spent fulfilling God's commands. Their weariness was generated from a sense of haughti-

ness. Therefore, the perfect response God delivers is that we must be subservient, and "walk humbly with God". Each rebuke of the prophet targets a precise flaw in the Jew. We are to learn from Micha that we must not seek glory, even if obtained through the 'semblance' of a command.

As Jews, our God-ordained mission is to present His Torah, not our feelings. As Jews, we are to follow His commands exactly. As Jews, we are to teach the world that perfection is arrived at, not through satisfying invented, social displays, but through refining our thoughts and action, aligning them with only Torah ideals without distortion.

Light the menorah privately, in your homes, as is the law. Through this display, the nations will respect the idea that our actions are not to please them, but God. They will then learn that social approval has no place in true, Torah life. But if we do seek public displays of religiosity, we teach the world that we value their ways, and their approval. We thereby cancel any lesson we might teach them, and our own nation.

Addendum

For those who wish to educate others on Channukah, a viable alternative would be an outreach activity where educators may demonstrate how to light the menorah, without reciting the blessings with God's name. In this venue, the educator is not suggesting in any form that the menorah may be lit away from peoples' homes. The educator should not make the lighting celebrative, but it should form part of an educational lesson. ■

Parsha: Vayeshev

from "Windows to the Soul"

RABBI MICHAEL BERNSTEIN

Seeds of Royalty

Joseph is carried off to slavery in Egypt setting off a chain of events, which would bring his entire family down after him and lead to centuries of Jewish bondage. At this moment of high drama, the scene shifts away to the story of Judah and Tamar (38:1). Judah falsely accuses Tamar of adultery, and when he realizes that he himself is the father of the unborn child, he acknowledges his paternity in a courageous confession. Then the story returns to Joseph in Egypt. It would appear that this interlude is somehow of crucial relevance to the divine plan of establishing the family of Jacob in Egypt. How is this so?

As we have seen from the beginning of Genesis, the underlying theme of the first book of the Torah is the resolution of brotherly strife. The final third of the book reveals the interaction of God's providence and the fledgling Jewish nation, which results in the personal growth of Jacob's children and the formation of a cohesive and loving family.

Rabbi Israel Chait, my teacher, has observed how each of the elements of the Jewish people had their unique challenges. Jacob's special attachment to Joseph and Benjamin, his sons from his beloved wife Rachel, interfered with the development of the nation. Joseph, blessed with talent and beauty, had to learn to direct his energies away from himself. And his brothers had to overcome their instinctive feelings of jealousy and accept their brother as he was: a superior person who was closer to their father and fit for leadership.

Against this background of spiritual growth, we encounter the subplot of Judah and Tamar. According to tradition, there will be two Messiahs, a preliminary one descended from Joseph, to be followed by a descendant of King David of the tribe of Judah. These two kingship strands begin at the point of Joseph's sale into slavery. Joseph descends to Egypt, and Judah turns away from his brothers because of his misgivings (see Rashi 38:1). The strands come together when Joseph and Judah become the chief agents in the restoration and redemption of Jacob's family, as they

will eventually come together in Messianic times. The interaction of Judah and Tamar holds the key to Judah's personal growth, making him worthy of kingship.

Judah's destiny for kingship probably began at the time of his birth when his mother Leah expressed gratitude to God. This trait is the cornerstone requirement of a Jewish earthly king. The honor and pomp associated with kingship cannot interfere with the obligation to recognize God's majesty.

Throughout the story of Joseph, we are keenly aware of Judah's leadership qualities. When Joseph's brothers decided to cast him into the pit it was Judah who initiated his sale to Egypt to avoid his being killed. All the brothers were righteous people devoid of conscious evil intent, with many rationalizations and justifications for their actions. It was Judah, however, who was able to step back from the precipice of murder and lead his brothers by his vision.

Later on, we see a repentant Judah vouch for the safety of Benjamin, Jacob's other favorite son, despite the preponderance of evidence that points to Benjamin's guilt. Judah was willing to sacrifice his own life to save his brother and rectify his sin. This is the heart of a king. The bond forged by this act of heroism lasted throughout history. The strip of the territory of Benjamin upon which the Temple stood was surrounded and protected by the territory of Judah. The tribe of Benjamin was also part of the Kingdom of Judah, unlike the tribes who were "lost." Most Jewish people today are descended from these two tribes.

In its broadest structure, the theme of the story of Judah and Tamar addresses Judah's erroneous first judgment of Tamar. In response to Judah's allegation, Tamar uses the same language the brothers used in reporting Joseph's death to their father (37:22). "Haker na," she says (38:25). "Please recognize [these things]." At that moment, when Tamar unwittingly confronted Judah with his own words, he realized his great sin against both Joseph and Tamar. Judah now understood that just as God had guided the events that led him to judge Tamar harshly and unjustly, so too might he have prematurely judged Joseph, leading to a tragic error.

Overcome by repentance, Judah said to Tamar (38:26), "She is more righteous than I am." With his new insight, Judah gains the capacity to withhold judgment, which becomes manifest in his defense of Benjamin. The story of Judah and Tamar is, therefore, not a digression but an intrinsic part of the providential process that guided Judah, the progenitor of the Davidic dynasty, in his spiritual growth and prepared the way for his descendants to ascend to royalty. ■

Joseph's Garment

Potiphar's wife tried repeatedly to seduce Joseph until, on one occasion, Joseph fled, leaving his garment in her clutched hand (39:7ff). Rejected, she used the garment as physical evidence to support her false accusation that Joseph had tried to seduce her. This is puzzling. After all, Joseph had rejected her advances a number of times, but he had never informed on her. What did she have to fear from him? Why did she slander Joseph after this incident? What was so unusual about it that the threshold of slander was crossed?

We find a clue in the Midrash Rabbah quoted by Rashi on the verse which introduces the event (39:11), "And it was like this day, and [Joseph] came to the house . . ." Commenting on the words "this day," the Midrash explains that it was "a special day, a day of merriment, a religious day, that they all went to the house of idol worship."

On a simple level, the Midrash is describing the circumstances that allowed Potiphar's wife to be found alone with Joseph. On a deeper level, the Midrash is hinting at a profound spiritual longing Joseph was experiencing at the time, a longing that Potiphar's wife believed would make him vulnerable to her advances.

In the United States, it is customary for families to get together on Thanksgiving Day. Traditionally, they play, watch football and share a festive meal. Those who cannot make it to these family gatherings generally experience feelings of unusual loneliness, longing, and melancholy. Although the celebration for most Americans is secular, the day touches people in a spiritual way by awakening memories of warmth, family and belonging to a greater whole. The inability to participate is frustrating.

Similarly, when the Egyptians celebrated their idolatry, the feeling of belonging to a greater whole aroused an element of spirituality, albeit corrupted, in the populace, as the Midrash would seem to indicate. At its source, this yearning stems from the soul's desire to cling to God in a service greater and more eternal than the body's temporal existence provides. This aspiration's importance is expressed in the Rosh Hashanah prayer in which we pray for mankind to form a single group in unified worship of God. Any national celebration taps into this spiritual yearning and diverts it into different channels.

Potiphar's wife sensed that the atmosphere of spirituality of the pagan holiday would touch Joseph and evoke within him feelings of longing for his own family. It was on that day that she again offered herself as a loving "surrogate family" with which to connect, a haven for Joseph's unrequited spiritual longing and loneliness. This approach is supported by Rashi, who

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states that Potiphar's wife sought to join with Joseph in this world and the next.

The Torah may also be alluding to another aspect of Potiphar's wife's plan (39:12), "And she grabbed him by his garment, saying, 'Lie with me.'" She may have been using the symbol of the garment to remind him of his own special garment that his brothers stripped from him and stained with blood before presenting it to their father. But on an even deeper level, it may be symbolic of a clever psychological ploy. The word for "garment," *begeg*, is also the three-letter root word for betrayal. In this instance, the double entendre of the word *begeg* reflects a profound insight into the nature of sin.

A person with a strong conscience, such as Joseph, cannot easily sin without rationalizing the guilty pleasure he is considering. One justification may take the form of rebellion, which can be liberating. The rebellious mind justifies sin by shifting blame to someone else. Potiphar's wife was playing on this by grabbing his "begeg" and encouraging him to betray and rebel against his Jewish family and their values.

In effect, she was saying to Joseph, "Look, your family sold you away and has not even regretted it enough to search for you in all this time. Cling to me and not to them." Such an appeal would allow Joseph to have the pleasure that Potiphar's wife offered. In his rebellion, he could blame his actions on his treacherous brothers who had supposedly caused him to sin by putting him into this situation. Of course, we do not know how much Potiphar's wife had investigated Joseph's history. If she, in fact, did not know about his brothers, Joseph could have supplied the words for her in his own mind to rationalize his betrayal.

The Midrash (Bereishis Rabbah 86:7; Tanchuma 8:9) is sensitive to the seductive appeal of this rationalization. It states that the image of Jacob appeared to Joseph, and he refrained from sin. Joseph realized that this beckoning union was offering only an ersatz version of the spiritual life of his family that he missed. The image of his righteous father would not allow him to rationalize his sin.

Despite Potiphar's wife's attempt to grab Joseph in his "rebellion," Joseph nonetheless left the *begeg* (garment, rebellion) in her hand, as the verse concludes.

When this happened, Potiphar's wife knew she had completely lost him. Furthermore, considering this her best opportunity for success, she had probably bared her soul to him as never before, and when he turned her down, the rejection must have been unbearable. Not surprisingly, the love she felt for him turned to hatred, and she turned on him with all her fury in an unbridled outburst of slander. ■

Chanukah



LIGHT & WISDOM

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

In Talmud Sabbath 23b, Rav Huna makes an enigmatic statement:

"One who is zealous with lights will have sons who are wise students."

Rashi comments: "lights" refers to the two commands of Sabbath and Channukah lights. Rashi quotes King Solomon's "Proverbs" (6:23) "For a command is a flame, and Torah is light..." Rashi's meaning is that the former generates the latter: the act of igniting a flame on Sabbath and Channukah results in wise sons who possess Torah wisdom. Rashi may have found a supporting verse for Rav Huna, but what is the sense of this verse, and Rav Huna's statement? How does the simple act of lighting Sabbath and Chanukah lights create sons who are wise? What is the relationship between lights and wise sons?

Let us examine the context of the quote (Proverbs, 6:20-23):

"[20] My son, guard the commands of your father and do not forsake the Torah of your mother. [21] Tie them to your heart often; bind them on your neck. [22] When you walk, it will guide you, when you repose, it will guard you, and when you awake, it will converse with you. [23] For a command is a flame, and Torah is light, and reproofs in moral instruction are the way of life."

We note many ideas, even within a single verse. For example, verse 20 compares "guarding father's commands" to "not forsaking mother's Torah". We learn that Torah as a complete system straddles both: 1) commands and 2) Torah, or moral instruction. It is insufficient that God give a system of commands, without also offering us a moral code. This necessity of a dual approach, or

borne out of man's dual nature: he is intellectual and emotional. Both aspects of man's nature are molded through, 1) following commands, which enlighten our minds to new, intelligent insights, and 2) moral restrictions, necessary for transforming our raw, emotional natures into individuals with refined, moral codes. The term "guard" applies to commands, as we must adhere meticulously to Torah performances. "Guarding" is applicable to that which must be carefully performed. We must not deviate, as God knows which commands will benefit our human nature, which He too created. Knowing both as the Creator, it is foolish for man not to cleave to and guard the 613 Commands. The term "do not forsake" is applicable to moral instruction. For it is here that man feels emotionally restricted, thereby wishing to abandon and forsake these stressful restrictions. As such, man is warned by King Solomon not to "forsake", since his natural, yet infantile emotional make up yearns for instinctual gratification. He will desire to run from imposed, Torah morality, as it stifles his current drive towards instinctual satisfaction...at every turn.

Verse 21. "Tie them to your heart often; bind them on your neck." King Solomon advises us to tie the Torah's principles to our "heart: and "neck". What is the metaphor of these two locations? The heart is our very life source, more than all other organs. King Solomon advises man to tie the Torah's principles to our very being. These ideas must penetrate our soul, until they become our very values. Only when man values something, can it be truly said that he has changed himself. Simple utterances are meaningless, if we do not truly believe what we enunciate. Additionally, as my close friend Rabbi Roth taught me, Maimonides teaches in his Commentary on the

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Mishna, (last Mishna in Talmud Maccos) that when man performs a Mitzvah for no other reason than his love of that command, only then does he entitle himself to the Next World. Again we see that Torah demands honesty, and that one truly values his performances. But performance alone is insufficient. King Solomon states that we must also “bind them on our necks.” The neck is the seat of what activity? Speech. Meaning, we must not only confirm with our hearts the truths of Torah, but our “speech”, or primary mode of expression and activity, must be engaged in Torah discussion. Only when man reaches this level, do we say he truly values Torah, to the point that he engages regularly in Torah discussions. Man’s activity is the barometer of his convictions.

Verse 22. “When you walk, it will guide you, when you lie down, it will guard you, and when you awake, it will converse with you.” How do we define these three states? “Walking” refers to our conscious, daily life. In this state, Torah “guides” us. This is easily understood. When we “lie down” to sleep, we now enter the stage where we lose our control; we are vulnerable. The Rabbis teach on the first page of Talmud Brachos, that we must recite the Shema prayer before going to sleep. We must ponder the Torah fundamentals, which the Shema contains at the time that our consciousness state slips away. At this critical moment, our emotions gain the upper hand. Sleep and falling into it, are emotional states. And at such a time, we must strengthen our bond to the Torah principles, lest we allow our emotions to destroy us. Thus, King Solomon chooses the expression of “guard”. At this time, we are in desperate need of a guard against our emotional impulses. And the opposite state of falling to sleep is our waking up. If we earnestly study, delving into God’s wisdom, applying His absolute, Torah truths during our daily lives, these ideals make their mark so indelibly, that they are the first thing on our minds when we awake. We are caught up with brilliant insights that we cannot wait to reengage in further study. This concept that the Torah is personified, as “speaking to us”, teaches that one who is devoted to his studies, has an additional ally: his studies take on a ‘life of their own’. Their appeal is so great, that his mind, unconsciously, initiates him back into Torah thought - even upon his waking. Just as one is impatient about an upcoming trip - waking on the day of his journey with great anticipation - so too the Torah student. Upon his waking up, he is immediately drawn back by the appeal of Torah, as if it “speaks to him”. King Solomon sums up the three states of our existence: consciousness, losing consciousness, and regaining it. In all three, the King advises us to insure we never abandon Torah thought.

This may seem insurmountable to many of us,

but think about how King Solomon referred to Torah as a “plaything” of God (Proverbs, 8:30). Just as a child with a new toy is engulfed with an exhilarated exuberance, so too were the Rabbis and our prophets. This must teach us that although we misdirect our childlike, excitement towards mundane activities and values, it is quite achievable that we too may reach an attachment to wisdom with this very same emotional draw. Do not be misguided by the fact that you do not see many adults – if any at all – with a youthful excitement about life. Children possess this excitement, and we are but older children in this respect. We have not lost this capacity for zest and abandon. What we have lost is our accurate selection of what object truly fuels the fire of our passions. King Solomon refers to wisdom as “playing” before God. It is something God created, containing unlimited enjoyment. Let us heed his words, and not the misguided masses.

Verse 23. “For a command is a flame, and Torah is light, and reproofs in moral instruction are the way of life.” A command offers illumination. Yet...it is but a single flame. It possesses the characteristic of illumination, but falls short in terms of giving us a full picture. However, Torah as a complete system is “light”. Only when one embraces the complete system, is he afforded with sufficient light for his life’s journey. Life has many twists and turns. Our nature as human beings is very complex. Knowledge is not readily available without due study of many hours. To live life properly, making correct decisions in all areas, to guard against destructive emotions, and to take a course that ensures success for our families and us...we require a charted map. One command is beneficial, but it cannot imbue us with the complete knowledge necessary for a full lifespan. The Torah is a complete system, addressing each and every aspect of our existence. Following a few, or even most of God’s law, we will fail. No, we cannot do it in a day. But our mind’s eye must be focused on this essential idea: everything in the Torah is absolutely necessary. Unlike the boors who ridicule “all those restrictions”, God’s opinion is different. He knows our nature, and created the Torah as a remedy. Just as a doctor would be listened to when he warns us that we will avoid death from disease by taking 10 pills daily, and we do, certainly, we must have greater conviction in what our Creator advises...not just for physical life, but the life of our soul.

“For a command is a flame, and Torah is light, and reproofs in moral instruction are the way of life.” Notice that this verse commences with “For”, meaning, it comes to explain the King’s previous statements. He is explaining exactly why Torah will guide, guard and engage us: it is that which “illuminates”. Without knowledge of reality, what

use is our life? The world operates by a design, and only through understanding this design, adhering meticulously to a system, which follows this design, will we find happiness, avoiding the conflicts experienced by those devoid of understanding. And as we said, intelligence is but one half of the equation...we also require moral instruction to restrain our instinctual impulses. Thus, the King concludes this verse with, “and reproofs in moral instruction are the way of life.” Following our emotions can remove us from life, both here and in the next world.

We may now return to our very first question: What does Rav Huna mean by “One who is zealous with lights will have sons who are wise students”? We mentioned that Rashi comments: “lights” refers to the two commands of Sabbath and Channukah lights. Rashi quotes King Solomon, “For a command is a flame, and Torah is light...” Thus, if one is careful with these two commands (flame), he will beget wise sons (light).

What is specific to Sabbath and Channukah lights, that these two commands were designated as essential to begetting wise sons? I believe by defining the nature of both Sabbath and Channukah, we will arrive at one possible answer.

Sabbath celebrates God as the ‘Creator’. Channukah celebrates God as the ‘Worker of miracles’. We must appreciate that God does both: He created the universe, and by definition, controls it, at times, creating a suspension in the very universal laws: what we refer to as miracles. On a deeper level, God’s act of creation teaches us that the universe operates by set laws, by wisdom. Our lives must be led by this truth, and by our relentless search for new knowledge. Whether we are walking, lying down, or rising up, we must never lose sight of this, our essential goal in life. But not only is God the Creator of all, including knowledge, He is also very much involved in our lives. He performs miracles. Thus, our knowledge of God is twofold: 1) He is Creator and 2) He is our God, readily available to intervene with miracles for those who follow Him.

If we possess an accurate knowledge of God as Creator, and the One who intervened at Sinai with His gift of the Torah, and guarding all of His followers with miracles, we then gain a true appreciation and knowledge of Judaism’s fundamentals. We then will pass this on to our children, and they too will become wise.

One who is careful with the Sabbath and Channukah lights is one who understands Judaism’s fundamentals concerning the most essential of all ideas.

What is God? He is the Creator of all: “Sabbath celebrates Creation”. He is the Controller of all: “Channukah celebrates Miracles.” ■



*Ancient coin with
Antiochos stamped
on coin face*

the Priests. Kingship returned to the Jewish people for more than two hundred years – until the destruction of the Second Temple.” (Maimonides, Mishne Torah, Hilchot Chanukah 3:1)

Maimonides describes the events that are recalled through the celebration of Chanukah. He explains that the Hellenist kings ruled the land of Israel and the Jewish people. Their reign was characterized by comprehensive religious oppression and material persecution. Eventually, the Hashmonaim – a family of Kohanim – led a rebellion and overthrew the oppressors. They reestablished the Jewish kingship. They appointed a king from their own family. The kingdom that they established lasted for over two hundred years and only ended with the destruction of the Second Temple.

It is clear from Maimonides’ comments that he views the two hundred year rule by the kings of the Hashmonaim positively. Maimonides’ inclusion of this assessment in his discussion of Chanukah also seems to indicate that the longevity

of their rule is somehow relevant to the celebration of Chanukah.

There are a number of problems with Maimonides’ position. One of these problems is his indication that the longevity of the rule of the Hashmonaim kings is relevant to the celebration of Chanukah. It is not immediately obvious why this factor should be worthy of note. The Jewish people were oppressed by the Hellenists – both spiritually and materially. Hashem had mercy upon His people and through the Hashmonaim, he rescued them from oppression. This seems to be an adequate reason to give thanks to Hashem through the observance of a celebration. Why is the length of rule of the Hashmonaim relevant?

Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik Zt”l offers and interesting explanation of Maimonides’ position. He bases his explanation upon a teaching from the Talmud. Like Chanukah, Purim recalls the salvation of the Jewish people from an enemy determined to destroy them. Haman carefully planned the destruction of the Jewish people. Through Hashem’s intervention, Mordechai and

Esther succeeded in defeating his designs and destroyed the enemies of the Jewish people. It would seem appropriate to commemorate the salvation of the Jewish people with the recitation of the Hallel. Why is the Hallel not recited on Purim? The Talmud offers three possible explanations. First, the events of Purim occurred in the exile. The Hallel is not recited on miracles that occur in the exile. Second, the Hallel is not needed on Purim. The reading of the Meggillah replaces the Hallel. Third, the salvation commemorated by Purim was not complete. The Jewish people were rescued from Haman. However, they remained in exile – subjects of the heathen king.[1]

Rav Soloveitchik suggests that Maimonides, apparently, adopts the Talmud’s final explanation. Hallel is not recited on Purim because the Jewish people remained the subjects of a foreign king. Rav Soloveitchik contends that Maimonides extrapolated from this ruling a general principle. The Hallel cannot be recited to commemorate any miracle that does not result in complete salvation – leaving the Jewish people under the role of a foreign king. Based on this interpretation of Maimonides’ position, Rav Soloveitchik suggests that we can understand Maimonides’ reference to the two hundred years of rule of the Hashmonaim kings.

According to Rav Soloveitchik, Maimonides is applying his understanding of the Talmud to the practice of reciting the Hallel on Chanukah. The Hallel is recited on each day of Chanukah. This is only consistent with Maimonides’ understanding of the Talmud’s ruling if Chanukah commemorates a complete salvation. A complete salvation must restore the Jewish leadership. Had the Hashmonaim not succeeded in reestablishing Jewish rule, it would not be appropriate to recite the Hallel on Chanukah. But, because the Hashmonaim did reign over the Jewish people for over two hundred years, the requirements for the recitation of the Hallel are met and the Hallel is recited on Chanukah.[2]

Rav Soloveitchik’s interpretation of Maimonides’ comments resolves another problem. Nachmanides comments that the Hashmonaim did not have the right to elevate themselves to the position of kings. He explains that once Hashem chose David as king, the institution of kingship was awarded to David and his descendants in perpetuity. In assuming the kingship, the Hashmonaim were usurpers. Nachmanides argues that they were severely punished for this trespass.[3] Of course, it is possible that Maimonides does not agree with Nachmanides’ position regarding the prohibition against the appointment of a king from outside of the family of David. Maimonides seems to indicate that

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although kingship will ultimately return to the family of David, it is not inappropriate to appoint a king from another family or shevet, if necessary. The Torah instructs us only that the kingship cannot be permanently transferred to another family.[4]

However, according to Rav Soloveitchik's interpretation of Maimonides' comments, there is no reason to assume that Maimonides disagrees with Nachmanides' position. It is possible that Maimonides would agree that the Hashmonaim were not entitled to assume the mantle of kingship. Maimonides is not endorsing their behavior. Instead, he is dealing with a different issue – was the salvation commemorated by Chanukah complete. The complete salvation required for the recitation of the Hallel requires the reestablishment of Jewish rule. This was done by the Hashmonaim. Whether they were correct in their behavior or were usurpers is not relevant to this issue. Irregardless of the advisability of their behavior, kingship was restored.

Rav Soloveitchik points out that there is a serious problem with his interpretation of Maimonides' comments. Maimonides discusses the omission of the Hallel from the observances of Purim. According to Rav Soloveitchik's interpretation of Maimonides' position, we would expect Maimonides to explain that the Hallel is not recited on Purim because the salvation commemorated by Purim was not complete. However, Maimonides does not offer this explanation. Instead, he explains that the Hallel is not recited on Purim because the reading of the Meggillah takes its place.[5]

In order to attempt to resolve this problem, it is important to define the question more clearly. Maimonides' comments in regard to Purim seem to indicate that the deficiency of the salvation commemorated by Purim does not prevent the recitation of the Hallel. In fact, there is an obligation to recite Hallel on Purim. However, this obligation is fulfilled through the reading of the Meggillah. In contrast, his comments in regard to Chanukah seem to indicate that an incomplete salvation would not have sufficed for the recitation of the Hallel. How can this contradiction be resolved?

The Talmud explains that, in general, when the Jewish people are rescued from an affliction, we are required to recite the Hallel.[6] In other words, the Talmud is identifying two elements that together create an obligation to recite the Hallel. First, there must be an affliction. Second, the Jewish people must be rescued from the affliction. It follows that in order to determine whether the redemption is complete, it is necessary to determine the nature of the affliction that the redemption addresses. For example, if the Jewish



people are faced with religious persecution, then redemption would be defined as the rescue from this religious persecution. Alternatively, if the Jewish people were confronted with annihilation, then redemption would be defined as the rescue of the nation from this destruction.

Let us apply the same analysis to the events commemorated by Purim and Chanukah respectively. Haman's design was to totally destroy the Jewish people. Redemption from this affliction would be defined as the rescue of the nation from Haman's elaborate plans to destroy the nation. In contrast, the Hellenists did not wish to destroy the Jewish people. They practiced religious persecution and they attempted to subjugate the Jewish people. Rescue from this affliction would be defined as the cessation of religious persecution and the freeing of the nation from foreign domination.

As Rav Soloveitchik explains, Maimonides maintains that the Hallel is not recited for a salvation that is not complete. But, the completeness of the salvation must be evaluated relative to the affliction. The events commemorated by Purim represent a complete salvation. The Jewish people were in exile. Exile is a tragedy. But,

Purim is not designed to recall our return to the land of Israel. Instead, it recalls that Haman wished to destroy the nation. Hashem intervened and defeated Haman. Was this rescue complete? When evaluated relative to the affliction, it is clear that it was. It is not relevant that the Jewish people remained in exile, ruled by a foreign king. The tragedy of exile is not the affliction that is recalled on Purim. However, the events commemorated by Chanukah occurred in the land of Israel. The affliction consisted of religious persecution and an attempt to subjugate the people in their own land. In this instance, the definition of salvation includes not only the cessation of religious persecution, but, also, the restoration of the independence of the nation and its regaining of freedom from foreign domination. In such an instance, the reestablishment of Jewish kingship is an essential element of the salvation. If the Hashmonaim had succeeded in bringing an end to religious prosecution, but had failed to rescue the nation from foreign domination, the salvation could not have been regarded as complete.

This explains Maimonides' position. Maimonides maintains that only a complete salvation obligates us in the recitation of the Hallel. On Purim, the salvation was complete. The Jewish people were saved from destruction at the hands of Haman. That they remained in exile does not negate the completeness of their salvation from Haman. Therefore, Maimonides rules that Purim requires the recitation of the Hallel, and this obligation is fulfilled through the reading of the Meggillah. However, the salvation of Chanukah was only completed through the reestablishment of Jewish rule in the land of Israel. Therefore, the restoration of the kingship is cited by Maimonides as an essential element of the salvation. ■

[1] Meschet Meggillah 14a.

[2] Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik, Harerei Kedem, volume 1, p 272.

[3] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Nachman (Ramban / Nachmanides), Commentary on Sefer Beresheit 49:10.

[4] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Mishne Torah, Hilchot Melachim 1:7-9.

[5] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Mishne Torah, Hilchot Meggillah 3:6.

[6] Meschet Pesachim 111a.

*Megillas Antiochos
was found in an
old edition of a
siddur printed in
Solonika, Greece.
Otzar HaTfilos
refers to it as a
"precious letter".*

MEGILLAS ANTIOCHOS

THE CHANUKAH STORY



1. And it was in the days of Antiochos, king of Greece, a great, mighty king was he, and he was strong in his reign and all kings listened to him. 2. And he conquered many cities and mighty kings, and he destroyed their palaces and their temples he burned with fire, and their men he imprisoned in jails. 3. From the days of Alexander the king, there arose no king like him on all sides of the river. 4. And he built a great city on the sea shore to be his house of kingdom, and Antiochos called the city by his name. 5. And also his second in command Bagris built another city next to it and Bagris called it by his name, and so is its name until this day. 6. In the twenty third year of his reign, it was the two hundred and thirteenth year of the building of the Temple, he gave face to ascend to Jerusalem. 7. And he answered and he said to his officers, "Do you not know that there is the Jewish people in Jerusalem amongst us? 8. To our god they do not sacrifice, and our religion they do not practice and the king's decrees they forsake, to do their religion. 9. And they also hope for the day of the dethroning of the kings and rulers and they say, "When will our King rule the seas and dry land, and the entire world will be given to our hand?" 10. It is not honorable to the kingdom to leave them be on the face of the earth.

11. And now let us come and we will ascend on them and nullify their treaty that was cut with them concerning Sabbath, the new Month and

circumcision. And the matter was good in the eyes of his officers and in the eyes of his entire army. 12. At that time, Antiochos the king arose and he sent Nikanor his second with a great army and many people and they came to the city of Judah, to Jerusalem. 13. And they slaughtered a great slaughter and built an altar in the Temple in the place where the G-d of Israel said to His servants, His prophets "Where I will cause to dwell My manifested presence eternally", in that place, they slaughtered the pig and they brought its blood to the sanctified courtyard. 14. And as this occurred, when Yochanan son of Mattisyahu the High Priest heard these doings occurred, he was filled with anger and rage, and the countenance of his face changed, and he counseled in his heart what should be done on this. 15. And then Yochanan son of Mattisyahu made himself a sword two spans long, one span wide, covered under his clothing. 16. And he came to Jerusalem and stood in the gate of the king, and he called to the gatekeepers and he told them "I am Yochanan son of Mattisyahu, I have come to come before Nikanor." 17. And then the gatekeepers and watchers came and told him the High priest of the Jews stands in the opening, and Nikanor answered and said to them, "Let him surely enter." 18. And then Yochanan was brought in before Nikanor and Nikanor answered and said to Yochanan, "Are you one of the rebels that rebels against the king and desires not the peace of his kingdom?" 19.

And Yochanan answered before Nikanor and said, "I am he, now I come before you, that which you wish I will do." 20. And Nikanor answered and said to Yochanan, "If as my will you will do, take a pig and slaughter it on the altar and robe in the king's clothing and ride of the king's horses, and as one of the kings beloved you will be."

21. And as Yochanan listened, he responded a thing, "My master, I fear from the children of Israel, perhaps they will hear I have done so and they will stone me with rocks. 22. Now let all men leave from before you, perhaps they will make the matter known." Then, Nikanor caused all men to leave from before him. 23. At that moment, Yochanan son of Mattisyahu lifted his eyes to the heavens and assembled his prayer before his G-d and he said, "My G-d and the G-d of my fathers Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, please do not give me into the hand of this uncircumcised, because if he will kill me, he will go and praise in the house of Dagon his god, and say "My god has given him to my hand." 24. At that moment, he stepped towards him three steps and plunged the sword into his heart, and he threw that corpse into the sanctified courtyard. 25. Before the G-d of heaven, Yochanan answered and he said, "My G-d, do not place on me sin that I have killed in the sanctified (area), now, so also give all the people that come with him to pain Judah and Jerusalem." 26. Then went out Yochanan son of Mattisyahu on that day and warred with the people and slaughtered in them a great slaughter. 27. The number of the slain that he slayed on that day was seventy two thousand seven hundred that were killed these to these. 28. On his return they built a pillar on his name and called it "Maccabee Killed the Mighty". 29. And it was that king Antiochos heard that his second in command Nikanor was killed, it grieved him much, and he sent to bring Bagris the wicked that mislead his people. 30. And Antiochos answered and said to Bagris, "Do you not know, have you not heard what the children of Israel have done? They killed my army and looted my camp and my officers?"

31. Now, on their money you are trusted or their houses are yours. Come, and ascend upon them and nullify the treaty which was cut with them (by) their G-d, Sabbath, the New Month and circumcision. 32. Then Bagris the wicked and all his camp came to Jerusalem and slaughtered in them a great slaughter and decreed a complete decree on Sabbath, the New Month and circumcision. 33. When this occurred that the matter of the king was urgent, there was found a man who circumcised his son and they brought the man and his wife and they hung him in front of the child. 34. And also the woman who bore the son, after

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her husband died and circumcised him at eight days, she went up to the walls of Jerusalem and her circumcised son in her hands. 35. And she answered and said, "To you, Bagris the wicked, you intend to nullify from us the treaty that was cut with us, the treaty of our fathers will not be nullified from us, Sabbath, the New Moon and circumcision from our children's children, it will not be removed." 36. And she dropped her son to the ground, and she fell after him and they both died together. And many of the children of Israel that did similarly in those days, and they did not veer from the treaty of their fathers. 37. At that time, the children of Israel said, "These to these, let us go and rest in the cave, lest we desecrate the Sabbath day, and they slandered them before Bagris. 38. Then Bagris the wicked sent men girded for battle and they came to the opening of the cave and said to them, "Come out to us, eat of our bread and drink of our wine and our actions you shall do." 39. And the children of Israel answered, "These to these, "we remember that which G-d commanded us on Mount Sinai, 'Six days you shall work, and do all your labor, and on the seventh day rest'. Now it is better for us that we die in this cave than desecrating the Sabbath day." 40. When this happened that the Jews did not come out to them, they brought wood and burnt it at the opening of the cave and there died like a thousand men and women.

41. Afterwards, there came out five sons of Mattisyahu, Yochanan and his four brothers and they warred with the people and slaughtered a great slaughter and drove them to the isles of the sea because they trusted in the G-d of heaven. 42. Then Bagris entered one ship and fled to king Antiochos and with him were men, escapees of the sword. 43. And Bagris answered and said to king Antiochos, "You the king, placed a command to nullify from the Jews Sabbath, the New Month and circumcision, a great deceit and rebellion in its midst. 44. That when there went all the people and nations and languages, they could not defeat the five sons of Mattisyahu. From lions they are stronger, and from eagles they are more swift, and from bears they are more quick. 45. Now king, I offer you good counsel, and do not war with few men, for if you war, you will be embarrassed in the eyes of all kings. 46. Therefore, write and send books in all cities of your kingdom, that there come officers of war and not leave one of them, and also elephants wearing armour with them." 47. And the matter was good with king Antiochos, and he sent books to all cities of his reign, and there came officers of all the people and kingdoms, and also elephants wearing armour came with them. 48. A second time Bagris the wicked arose and came to Jerusalem, he broke the

wall, and he cut off the water supply, and he broke in the Temple thirteen breaches and also from the stones he broke until they were like dust and he thought in his heart and said, "This time I will not be overtaken because of the numbers of my army and might of my hand". But the G-d of heaven did not think so. 49. And when the five sons of Mattisyahu heard, there arose and came to Mitzpeh Gilead, that were there the remnant of the house of Israel from the days of Samuel the prophet. 50. They decreed a fast, and sat on ashes to seek out mercy from before G-d of heaven.

51. Then there fell good counsel in their hearts, Judah the firstborn, Simon the second, the third Yochanan, the fourth Yonasan, the fifth Elazar. 52. And their father blessed them and so he said, "Judah my son, I liken you to Judah son of Jacob who was equated to a lion. 53. Simon my son, I liken you to Simon son of Jacob who killed the inhabitants of Shechem. 54. Yochanan my son, I liken you to Avner son of Ner, officer of the army of Israel. Yonasan my son, I liken you to Yonasan son of Saul, who killed the Philistine people. 55. Elazar my son, I liken you to Pinchas son of Elazar who was jealous for his G-d and saved the children of Israel. 56. On this, there went out the five sons of Mattisyahu on that day, and warred with the people, and slaughtered in them a great slaughter, and there was killed from them Judah. 57. At that moment when the sons of Mattisyahu saw that Judah was killed, they returned and they came to their father. 58. And he said to them, "Why have you returned?" And they answered and they said, "On account that our brother was killed who was equated to all of us." 59. And Mattisyahu their father answered and said to them, "I will go out with you and I will fight with the people, lest the house of Israel perish, and you are frightened on your brother." 60. And Mattisyahu went out on that day with his sons and fought with the people.

61. And G-d of heaven gave all the mighty of the nations into their hands. And they slaughtered a great slaughter, all who seized the sword, and all who drew the bow, officers of war and the seconds in command, there was not left one remnant, and there fled the rest of the people to the cities of the sea. 62. And Elazar was involved in killing the elephants and he was submerged by the chariots of the elephants, and when they returned, they looked for him among the living and among the dead, and they could not find him. And afterwards they found him that he was submerged by the chariots of the elephants. 63. And the children of Israel were gladdened that there was given to their hands their enemies. From them they burned with fire and from them they pierced with the sword,

and from them they hung on trees. 64. And Bagris the wicked that misled his people, the children of Israel burned him with fire. 65. And then, Antiochos the king heard that Bagris the wicked was killed and all officers of war with him, he entered into a ship and fled to the cities of the sea, and it was that each place he came to there, they mocked him and called him "the runaway". 66. Afterwards, the children of the Hasmoneans came to the temple, and they built the broken gates and they closed the breaches, and purified the courtyard from the casualties and from the impurities. 67. And they searched for pure olive oil to light the candelabrum, and they did not find but one canister that had the seal of the ring of the High Priest and they knew that it was pure, and it contained a measurement to light for one day. 68. And G-d of heaven Who causes to dwell His name there, gave a blessing and they lit from it eight days. 69. Therefore there established the children of the Hasmoneans a fulfillment, and they forged a law, and the children of Israel with them as one, to make these eight days days of drinking and happiness as the appointed days written in the Torah, and to light on them lights to make known what was done to them (by) the eternal G-d of heaven. 70. And on them, one may not eulogize, nor to decree fast days, or have a fast, except if it was accepted on it prior to this and pray before their G-d.

71. But the Hasmoneans and their children and their brothers they did not decree on them to nullify service of work. And from that time, there was no name to the kingdom of Greece. 72. And there received the kingdom, the children of the Hasmoneans and their grandchildren from that time until the destruction of the Temple two hundred and six years. 73. Therefore, the children of Israel from that day in all their exiles guard these days and call them days of drinking and gladness from the twenty-fifth day of Kislev, eight days. 74. From that time and eternally, there should not be removed from them, that were in their Temple, priests, Levites and their wise men who established upon them and upon their grandchildren eternally.

Other prayer books add these verses:

"And these days, they arose and accepted on themselves and on their children and on their grandchildren eternally, the priests, Levites and wise men that were in the temple, and they were not removed forever. The G-d that did with them a miracle and a wonder, He should do with us miracles and wonders and sustain with us the verse that was written as the days of your Exodus from the land of Egypt, I display wonders, Amen." ■

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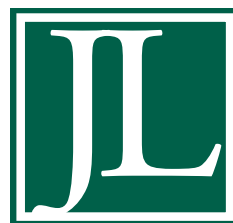
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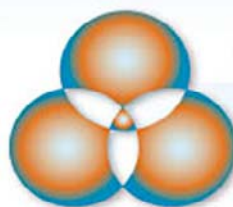
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