

"A gold ring in the nose of a pig, [so too is] a beautiful woman with poor character".
(Mishley 11:22) What is the idea?

Answer on last page

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Weekly Parsha

Pinchas

RABBI BERNARD FOX

"Because he was zealous for his G-d and he atoned for Bnai Yisrael, he and his descendants after him will have a permanent covenant of priesthood."
(BeMidbar 25:13)

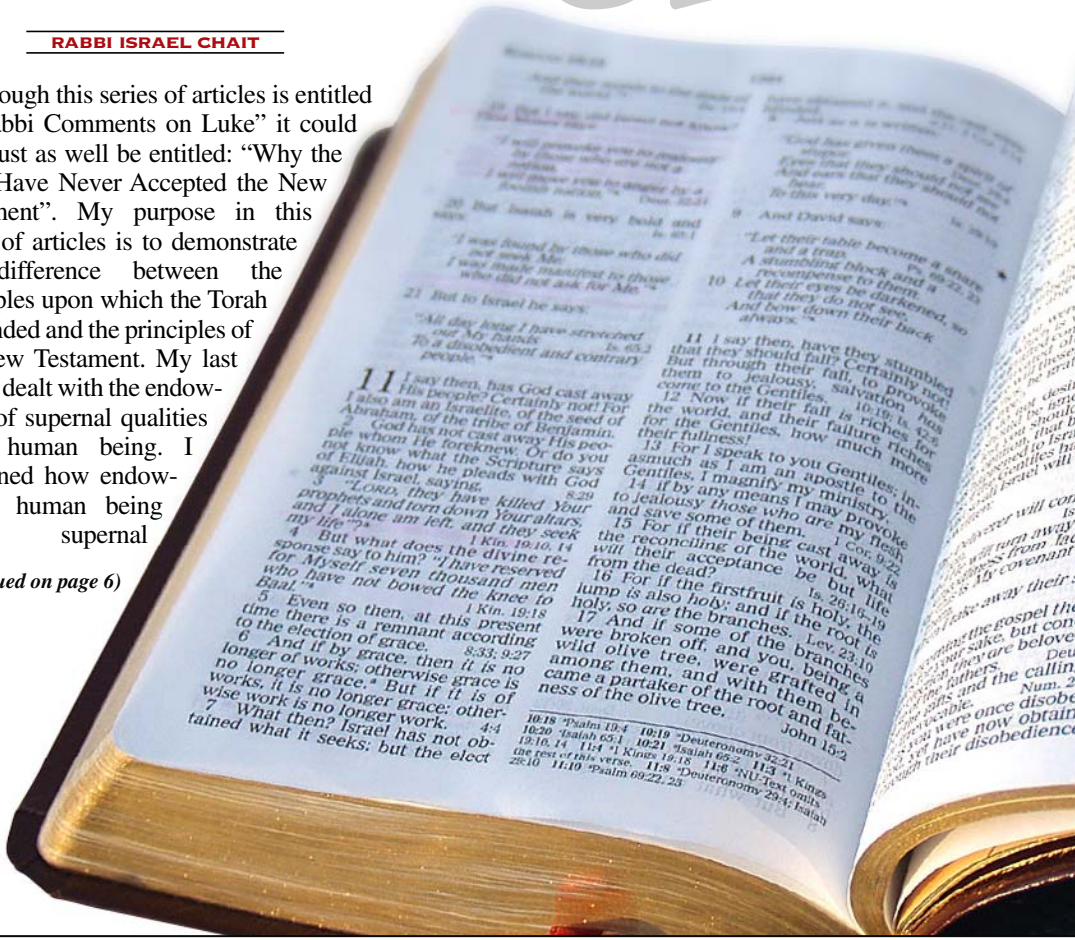
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a Rabbi Comments on **NEW TESTAMENT** Luke

RABBI ISRAEL CHAIT

Although this series of articles is entitled "A Rabbi Comments on Luke" it could have just as well be entitled: "Why the Jews Have Never Accepted the New Testament". My purpose in this series of articles is to demonstrate the difference between the principles upon which the Torah is founded and the principles of the New Testament. My last article dealt with the endowment of supernal qualities in a human being. I explained how endowing a human being with supernal

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(Pinchas cont. from pg. 1)

Weekly Parsha

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Parshat Balak ends with an account of Moav's attempt to corrupt Bnai Yisrael. The nation of Moav recruits the young women of the nation. They are sent into the camp of Bnai Yisrael with orders to seduce the men. Once the seduction is accomplished, the women entice the men to participate in idolatry.

This plan almost succeeds. The young women are successful in seducing some of the men. A princess of Midyan – Kazbi, the daughter of Tzur – actually succeeds in seducing one of the leaders of the shevet of Shimon – Zimri, the son of Salu.

Pinchas, the grandson of Ahron, intervenes. He executes Zimri and Kazbi while they are in the act of fornication.

Our parasha begins with an account of the rewards received by Pinchas. Among these rewards, Hashem promises Pinchas a permanent covenant of priesthood. What is the meaning of this blessing?

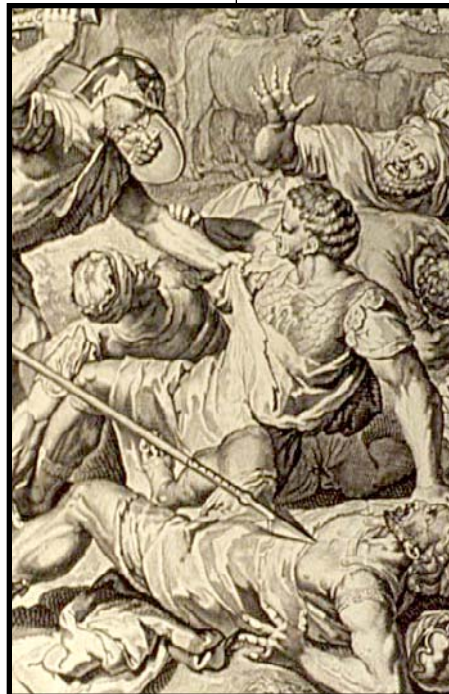
Superficially, it seems that this covenant endowed Pinchas and his descendants with the priesthood. They were made Kohanim. However, Pinchas was that grandson of Ahron. The descendants of Ahron were already chosen to serve as the Kohanim! What is Hashem giving to Pinchas that he does not already possess?

In fact, it is not at all clear that Pinchas and his descendants were already appointed as Kohanim. How is this possible? The Talmud in Tractate Zevachim discusses this issue. The Talmud explains that there are two opinions regarding the identity of the original Kohanim. The opinions differ on a simple question. Who were the original Kohanim? Were the only first Kohanim the sons of Ahron? Alternatively, did this group include all of Ahron's descendants alive at that time? What is the difference between these two possibilities? Pinchas was a grandson of Ahron. He was Ahron's descendant. However, he was not Ahron's son. According to the first opinion, only the sons of Ahron were the original Kohanim. Their descendants who were born subsequently also became Kohanim. However, descendants already born were not included in the Kehunah – the Priesthood. This

means that Pinchas was not one of the original Kohanim. Neither could his descendants serve as Kohanim. He was not a son of Ahron. His descendants could not claim descent from a Kohen.

According to the second opinion, all the descendants of Ahron were included in the original group of Kohanim. Pinchas was a grandson of Ahron. He was a descendant. Therefore, he and his children were already included in the Kehunah.[1]

Rashi adopts the first opinion. He indicates that Pinchas was not one of the original Kohanim.[2] Maimonides sides with the second opinion. He maintains that Pinchas was included among the original Kohanim.[3]



Our pasuk must be interpreted according to each of these opinions. According to the first opinion, our passage is easily understood. Pinchas and his children were not originally included in the Kehunah. At this point, he and his descendants are granted Kehunah. This was part of his reward for acting zealously on behalf of Hashem. In our pasuk, the Almighty creates a permanent change in the status of Pinchas and his descendants. They will now be Kohanim and have the same status as Ahron's sons and their progeny.[4]

However, according to the second opinion, our pasuk is not as easily understood. According to this opinion, Pinchas and his descendants already possessed the status of Kehunah. What new office is given to Pinchas in our passage?

Rabbaynu Avraham ibn Ezra proposes an answer to this question. He explains that the passage does not represent a promise of Kehunah. Pinchas and his descendants already had this status. Instead, in our pasuk, Hashem awards Pinchas the office Kohen Gadol. Pinchas and his descendants will hold this office.[5]

Gershonides observes that most of those who held the office of Kohen Gadol were descendants of Pinchas. However, there were exceptions. Some of those who served as Kohen Gadol were descendants of Itamar. How can these exceptions be reconciled with Ibn Ezra's

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(Pinchas continued from page 2)

Religion

interpretation of the pasuk?

Gershonides responds that Hashem did not tell Pinchas that every Kohen Gadol would be one of his descendants. Instead, Hashem promised that this office would always be associated with the descendants of Pinchas. The office would never be transferred to a different family. At times, there would not be a fitting descendant of Pinchas to hold the office. Under such circumstances, the Kohen Gadol would come from the family of Itamar. Nonetheless, this interruption will only be temporary. The office will always return to the descendants of Pinchas.

Geshonides maintains that this is an example of a general principle. Hashem's blessings often involve some element of permanency. For example, kingship is awarded to the shevet of Yehudah. This does not mean that there will never be a king who is not from the shevet of Yehudah. Geshonides points out that such an interpretation is untenable. At times, there may not be an appropriate candidate for kingship from the shevet. Alternatively, sometimes the shevet will deserve to be punished. Under these circumstances, the kingship must temporarily be transferred to another shevet. This is not an abrogation of the blessing. This kingship always returns to Yehudah. Any interruption is temporary. The blessing does not promise that there will never be an interruption. It promises that the kingship will never be permanently removed from the shevet.[6]

“Be an enemy unto the people of Midyan and strike them. For they acted as enemies towards you through their plotting. They plotted against you in the matter of Peor and in the matter of Kazbi the daughter of Tzur their sister who was killed on the day of the plague for the matter of Peor.” (BeMidbar 25:17-18)

Hashem commands Moshe to treat the people of Midyan as enemies. Bnai Yisrael are commanded to make war with them. This is because Midyan allied with Moav. They joined in the plot to corrupt Bnai Yisrael.

The pasuk explains that Midyan shared responsibility for the “matter of Peor.” This phrase is not difficult to interpret. The women of Midyan and Moav attempted to induce the men of Bnai Yisrael to engage in idolatry. The idolatrous entity they introduced to Bnai Yisrael was Peor. The pasuk admonishes the people to strike Midyan in response to this nation's efforts to introduce the worship of Peor among Bnai Yisrael. However, the pasuk adds that the people of Midyan should also be treated as enemies because of the “matter of Kazbi the daughter of Tzur.”

This phrase is difficult to understand. Kazbi was one of the women recruited to participate in the seduction of the men of Bnai Yisrael. She was one of the specific women who were involved in the matter of Peor. It seems that the “matter of Peor” and the “matter of Kazbi” are two references to the same incident and evil. Why does the pasuk refer to the incident with both of these descriptions? Why is the incident described as the matter of Peor and as the matter of Kazbi?

The commentaries offer various answers to this question. According to Rashi, the pasuk is not only an admonishment to strike against Midyan. The pasuk is also a warning. Hashem commands Bnai Yisrael to wage war with Midyan and explains the urgency of this mission. Midyan is a dangerous adversary. This nation is completely committed to the destruction of Bnai Yisrael. What is the indication of this commitment? The nation sent Kazbi, the daughter of Tzur, into the camp of Bnai Yisrael. They assigned her the role of seductress and harlot. This is remarkable! Kazbi was the daughter of Tzur. Tzur was one of the kings of Midyan. The people of Midyan were willing to defile a princess in order to destroy Bnai Yisrael. This is indicative of extreme, self-destructive hatred.[7] Bnai Yisrael must protect itself from this desperate enemy.

Rabbaynu Avraham ibn Ezra offers a different explanation of the passage. He explains that the pasuk is providing an enumeration of reasons for the war Bnai Yisrael is to wage. The first reason is that Bnai Yisrael must respond to the

actions already taken by Midyan. Midyan plotted against Bnai Yisrael. Midyan attempted to corrupt Bnai Yisrael. Second, Bnai Yisrael should be mindful of the future. Pinchas had killed Kazbi, the daughter of Tzur. Tzur was a king. His daughter was a princess. Surely, the people of Midyan would wish to avenge the death of their princess! In short, Midyan had attempted to destroy Bnai Yisrael without provocation. Now, Midyan had an additional motivation – the death of their princess.[8] Bnai Yisrael must protect themselves from Midyan. They must strike their enemy before Midyan can again plot against them. ■

[1] Mesechet Zevachim 101b.

[2] Rabbaynu Shlomo ben Yitzchak (Rashi), Commentary on Sefer BeMidbar 25:13.

[3] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Mishne Torah, Hilchot Bi'at HaMikdash 5:12.

[4] Rabbaynu Shlomo ben Yitzchak (Rashi), Commentary on Sefer BeMidbar 25:13.

[5] Rabbaynu Avraham ibn Ezra, Commentary on Sefer BeMidbar 25:13.

[6] Rabbaynu Levi ben Gershon (Ralbag / Gershonides), Commentary on Sefer BeMidbar, (Mosad HaRav Kook, 1998), p 141.

[7] Rabbaynu Shlomo ben Yitzchak (Rashi), Commentary on Sefer BeMidbar 25:18.

[8] Rabbaynu Avraham ibn Ezra, Commentary on Sefer BeMidbar 25:18.

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One Path TO God

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

Perfect Pill: Part II



The reader below responds to the "Perfect Pill" printed in the JewishTimes June 29, 2007 issue

Reader: I don't mean to offend you, but as I read the article, I found myself getting annoyed. I think it's arrogant to state that there's only one way to grow closer to God and that is through the Orthodox tradition. I disagree. I do believe there are many paths to grow closer to God and embracing the Orthodox tradition is only one of them. Just because Orthodox was the original form of Judaism doesn't make it the best, the truest religion or what God had intended in terms of how we should live. One of the aspects of Judaism I love is the encouragement to question and to be co-creators with the Creator to help make this world a better place. Conservative Judaism holds on to tradition, but also changes with modern times. Women should be allowed to be Rabbis and should be able to participate in a minyan...God is not a he nor is God a she...so a she or a he should be given equal status.

Mesora: First off, this is not about personal offenses. It is also irrelevant if you get annoyed, so using that as a line of response has no weight to any search for truth.

You wrote, "I think it's arrogant to state that there's only one way to grow closer to God and that is through the Orthodox tradition. I disagree. I do believe there are many paths to grow closer to God and embracing the Orthodox tradition is only one of them." If this were true, then God would not have included the following prohibition in His Torah: "This entire matter which I command to you, guard yourselves to observe it: do not add upon it, and do not subtract from it." (Deut. 13:1) It could not have

been stated any simpler; God demands that His system is unaltered in any way. There is only "one path" to God. Tampering with this system, or worse, creating a new one, are direct violations. This also makes sense, since there is only one type of human being. Regardless of external differences, mankind's psyche and soul are identical across all cultures: we all seek happiness, grieve over family deaths, possess greed, love and hate, and all other capacities. As such, the most enjoyable life for one person will also offer the same psychological state for all others. God knows what is best for mankind; He gave only one system for all of us...who have descended from one couple. Man has not changed over the millennia, so God's system has not changed.

The verse above attests to the fact that God's Torah will never be exchanged. This truth forms one of the Thirteen Principles of Judaism, and also attests to God's omniscience: He knows the future and saw no need to ever alter the Torah. So of there is arrogance here, it is truly you who feels God is wrong, and that you are right about "many paths" to God. In stark contrast to this verse above, Conservative and Reformed Judaism have no verse licensing their Torah changes, as God does not contradict Himself.

Reality: Externally Based

You must understand that our subjective beliefs do not dictate reality. For example, I might "believe" that stealing less than a dollar from a bank shouldn't be considered robbery, nor punishable. But the definition of stealing – defined as "any quantity" – makes sense, thereby rejecting my position. My "belief" is baseless, is inconsequential, and cannot dictate reality...since I arrived here "after" reality existed.

Your belief of what is Judaism, as well, is not based on any study of Judaism or definition of what is

God's will. You have irrationally and axiomatically posited your beliefs as if they dictate reality, with no proof or reason. You even contradict God's words. And despite your lack of proof, you seek Judaism to conform to your beliefs. But you make a fundamental error: Judaism is to be studied, and only 'then' can we learn what it is. It is just like any science: the phenomena are first observed, and conclusions are drawn only "afterwards". A scientist doesn't walk into his lab one day, and posit new laws of nature prior to examining nature. That would be foolish, and he will most certainly be wrong. Your approach of mandating beliefs without studying our great Sages and Rabbis is equally foolish.

Deferring to the Wise

You never administered an injection into your own body. You wisely prefer to let those who know more, address your life's concerns. So doesn't it concern you that the Sages and Rabbis – universally accepted as the greatest minds as their works testify – never suggested any form of Judaism other than Talmudic, Orthodox Judaism? Have you read the origins of Conservative and Reformed? They were not based on any meticulous studies or insights or Torah sources; rather, they sought convenience and reinterpreted Torah, or adopted a view that Torah isn't Divine. And both did so without the traditional, Talmudic analysis, which you have yet to claim even a novice status. Your approach is remarkably unfounded, and surprisingly in denial of the very system you wish to follow. Study if you will, Tosfos, Rashi, Nachmanides, Sforno, Rashba, Radak, Ritva, Rabbeinu Nissim, the Rif, Taz, Shach, Rav Yosef Caro, Maharsha, Malbim, Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch, Ibn Ezra, Rabbi Moshe Feinstein, Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik...and hundreds of others. The works of any one of these giants will be incomprehensible to you, since you have not mastered Talmudic thought. Their individual works span many decades and volumes. Their editions will fill your home. Their depth amazed the greatest minds alive today. And you make a claim that not one of these minds ever di? Do you see any problem with your position?

You defer to the wise in one aspect of your life, but not in another.

You also claim greater knowledge than those, of whom you have never read.

Truth Seekers or Not?

Do you find it as telling as I do, that not one leader in the Reformed or Conservative movements measures up to any of these Orthodox, genius minds? Do you know why this is? It is quite simple: what attracts one to the Reformed and Conservative camps is not a study of truth, but rather, emotional gratification. The movements are founded on this emotional crutch, and its followers breed it. One need not possess brilliance to follow the simple lure of these

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two movements. However, to be a master within the Orthodox, Talmudic chain of transmission, each leader possessed an astonishing acumen unmatched by most other groups. I say "most", for we do find pockets of intellectuals throughout history; minds that pursued only truth as the Rabbis, and engaged in high levels of reason. These include the Greeks: a group whom the Talmudic Rabbis acquiesced to on one occasion.

The Orthodox Rabbis conceding to gentiles proves that the Orthodox Sages had no problem admitting defeat. They were not out for glory, but for truth. So when they realized the Greeks surpassed them in science, they admitted so. In this fashion, they remained attached to truth, and led others to study the Greek wisdom, as should be done. Had Conservative and Reformed Jews surpassed the Orthodox, the Orthodox would have admitted so again. But they have not.

The Contradiction

But your view on its own merit is self-defeating. You wrote, "Conservative Judaism holds on to tradition, but also changes with modern times." According to your view, Jesus was right in his position to modify Judaism as he saw fit. Yet you vilify Christianity. According to you, you should embrace Christianity. Truthfully, you should not live by any one religion, since you opine, "there are many paths". Why select one over another?

Here's something to think about: according to you, I would be correct if I were to make "changes with the times" to Conservative Judaism, and mandate something more strict than Orthodoxy...and you would have to follow it!

This approach, which lacks the allegiance and meticulous adherence to the finest details, will surely bury Judaism. In his Laws of Idolatry, Maimonides commences by recording how the first generations acted like Conservative and Reformed Jews. The slowly changed God's worship, generation by generation...until after many years, no one heard of God, but only worshipped idols. God was not known to the world, precisely due to the constant "changing with the times" approach to religion.

The contradiction: the very "traditions" you seem to hold on to as you said, are only in your hands due to the Rabbis and Sages mentioned above, and their unwavering diligence, all of whom preserved it for you. For had they followed the path which you preach, Judaism would be long gone. You are in a contradiction: you enjoy Judaism's survival lead by these Torah giants, but now you cast them aside, with no Talmudic argumentation other than "convenience", and female equality?

Equality of Women

The fact is that nothing in Judaism endorses the degradation of women. Your argument that humans must mirror God's "genderless" nature is not reason-

able. Perhaps I too will suggest that God's ability to kill man endorses my right to do the same. This reasoning is arbitrary. In fact, God Himself told Abraham to listen to his wife. And you have heard of Deborah, the judge? She surpassed many men. Ruth the Moabite? Esther, the queen? The daughters of Tzelafchad?

If you would study why Torah requires separate seating, hair covering, and the rejection of women Rabbis, instead of reacting without first studying, you would appreciate the reasoning...and it has nothing to do with viewing women as lower than men.

The fact is that in the past, women read the Torah in shuls. The reason they are not allowed is not male chauvinism. It is due to the Rabbis' injunction. The Rabbis saw the men slacking off, as the women read. The Rabbis didn't want the men to continue in their laziness, but rather, that they fulfill their obligations. Therefore, the Rabbis' mandated that women should not read the Torah in shul, thereby forcing men to fulfill their obligations. It had nothing at all to do with rejecting women, or belittling their status. But you would not know this, unless you studied. Ignorance can lead to false conclusions.

You may ask why women are not obligated in Torah study. But keep in mind; this is not a prohibition, but an exemption based on a practical issue. God's wisdom deemed it vital to human perfection that we all endure a growth process, with two parents as authority figures. Later in life, we are to transpose our learned sense of authority from our parents, onto God. Without being raised with authority figures, we will reject God.

Now, as part of this maturation process, God also saw it vital that one parent attend to the child's psychological and emotional needs, this being the mother, who caresses and pampers the baby, speaking softly, and offers a delicate, maternal security and unconditional love. Simultaneously, the father's role is to attend to the child's intellectual growth. One parent is necessary for each role. It matters none who attended to what role. What matters is that a single parent is obligated and fulfills its responsibilities. Since the mother is at the beckon cry of the child, God did not obligate her in commands that would conflict with the practicality and time restraints associated with child rearing. Raising the infant is a full-day affair. God also equipped women with greater intuition for children's needs, precisely because this is required for her God-given role. And men are equipped with more black and white reasoning and are not as emotionally wired, precisely because this is what Torah study and teaching requires: attending to the cold, hard facts. Had the tables been turned, men would be more emotional, and women more black and white. Only God knows why He selected each gender for its respective role.

Finally, both genders are required for human life

to continue, so it is baseless to suggest inferiority of women. No Orthodox Rabbi could exist without a mother. No Orthodox Rabbis or Sage ever belittled God's will that women exist, or their role.

God's Forewarning

God knew very well that future generations would seek to eliminate laws, so He wrote that we must not detract from the Torah. God was addressing the Conservative and Reformed camps: "This entire matter which I command to you, guard yourselves to observe it: do not add upon it, and do not subtract from it." (Deut. 13:1) Two of our 613 laws, have been understood by leaders from Moses through Maimonides to mean just that: do not add to, or subtract from Torah.

Summary

In summary, Judaism must be approached, as is any other science: we first observe its laws, and then arrive at a conclusion. We must abandon this approach of having "feelings" or "beliefs", and seeking to conform Judaism to these wishes. It is "we" who must conform to God's wishes.

We must recognize the brilliant minds that preceded us, and wonder why none of them suggested to "Conserve" or "Reform" Judaism. We also must wonder why such minds are completely absent in both camps.

Would a Conservative or Reformed Rabbi today suggest one must be killed if he carried on the Sabbath? Of course not, they would even suggest you drive to temple for Sabbath services, and carry your prayer book. In doing so, they deny God's words in Number 15:35 where God commanded the Sabbath violator to be killed. And the claim that Torah and God's word can be changed today, denies God's words again: "I am God. I do not change" (Malachi, 3:6) as well as "...do not subtract from it." (Deut. 13:1) God never rescinded the decree of death for Sabbath violation.

The greatest minds since Torah's receipt on Sinai throughout time until 200 years ago all agreed: Orthodox, Talmudic and Mishnaic Judaism is God's will. It is not to be changed based on convenience or the "modernity" of our times. This is akin to saying that God could not anticipate future generations. It is only the last few generations that, with the feeblest positions, desired to alter Torah for motives of convenience and assimilation.

As we follow our doctors of medicine and do not trust our measly knowledge, we must also trust the Doctors of Talmud, and not suggest we know better. We must certainly accept God's commands and teachings as accurate, and not deny Him.

There is only one human race, and therefore, only one best system: only one path leads to God. And this path is one that God commanded us to retain without any alteration. ■

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a Rabbi Comments on Luke



qualities is a dilution of one's belief and faith in God. It makes no difference whether this person is a righteous person, prophet, or Messiah. If one imbues that individual with faith and belief he has deviated from the Torah system. The prophet expresses it in the following manner. "Cursed be the man who places his faith in man and makes flesh his strength (Jeremiah 17:5)." Similarly, before reading from the scroll in the Sabbath service we say, "Not in any man do I put my trust nor on any angel do I rely - only on the God of heaven."

Belief in the person of messiah is a major tenet of the New Testament. The message or "good news" of the NT is very closely related to that belief. Part of the message or most essential communication of the NT is that the messiah has arrived in the person of a Jew called Jesus. Of course it is quite clear to anyone that if the messiah of the Old Testament as described by the prophets had arrived bringing peace and knowledge of God to mankind there would be no need for any message, it would be self-evident. From the NT it seems clear that Jesus himself agreed with this obvious notion when he said, "This generation shall not pass till all these things be fulfilled (Matthew 24:34, Mark 13:30)." Before he died, he saw that his vision would not be fulfilled, and admitted defeat. He cried out, "My God, my God why hast thou forsaken me (Matthew 27:46, Mark 15:34)."

Christianity refused to accept this defeat. In order to solve the dilemma they invented a new kind of messiah - one who brings salvation to man through his death, not his life. This was not the messiah of Isaiah who rules the world with justice, knowledge, and wisdom but one who saves mankind through his dying.

The idea of a dead messiah was a new concept, never before heard among the scholars or even lay people of Israel. What I would like to show is just how strange and impossible this idea sounded to the Pharisees and the vast majority of the Jewish people. In order to deal with the obvious questions and contradictions that emerge from this notion of a messiah Christianity has created an institution called theology in which the art of explaining things away reaches amazing heights. Support is brought for the Christian doctrine by means of text fragments, projections, and mistranslations. I am not about to rehash this kind of material.

This has been done amply in the past by others. I agree with Maimonides that no statement can be given which cannot be twisted to the very opposite of its true meaning by anyone who wishes to do so. As Maimonides states even God was unable to accomplish this. He stated clearly in His Torah God is one. It would seem nothing could be plainer and yet Christianity sought to derive from this very verse that God is three. Even the overt omission of a trinity from the texts of the Torah would seem sufficient to demonstrate to any reasonable man the Torah's firm denial of such a doctrine. I therefore believe that dialogues and debates over textual matters of the Torah as pertains to Christianity is futile. In the series of articles I am

presently writing I am approaching the topic from a different standpoint. My approach is thematic and conceptual. I wish to elucidate the system of Torah to show what the fundamentals are and how these fundamentals are in direct opposition to the NT and to Christian doctrine. I will deal the same way with the essential message of Christianity in the NT.

Allow me to give an example. Christians commonly bring support for their doctrine from Isaiah 7:14, "Behold the 'almah' will become pregnant and give birth to a son." While there is no indication that this verse in Isaiah is referring to the messiah, they must assume it is in order to use this verse for support. Further they must translate the word "almah" as virgin while in Hebrew the word for virgin is "betulah"; "almah" means young girl as in Genesis 24:43. This is always pointed out by those who wish to refute the Christian "proof."

My own approach, a conceptual one, is as follows: We have a Torah law that it is a major violation to strike one's parent in a way that inflicts a wound. Under certain conditions this is punishable by death. The oral law takes up the question of determining who is one's biological father. There is always the possibility of extramarital relationships. The Talmud explains that in Halacha we have a principle of determination by majority. Whenever a husband and wife relationship exists we always attribute the offspring to the one assumed to have performed the majority of sexual acts - the husband. All paternal lineages are determined by this principle. The Talmud makes it clear that without this principle there is no way to establish paternal lineage. Even if a man and woman were isolated together we could not assume that there was absolutely no extramarital intercourse. We have another Halachik principle, that "there is no guardian when it comes to sexual matters." The Torah, based on sound principles of psychology, knows that man can implement the most devious tactics to obtain satisfaction when overcome by sexual passion.

Now let us return to Isaiah. Here we find the prophet being told that God will give him a sign. It is abundantly clear from the above that a virgin birth can never be a sign. There is no plausible way to determine through Halacha or even through common sense that a certain person was truly a virgin and had no intercourse with another human being. The idea of using a virgin birth as a sign is intrinsically absurd. You can now imagine how this Christian idea sounded to Jewish scholars replete with in-depth

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Religion

knowledge of Torah and its true principles of human psychology.

The idea of a virgin birth stems from the desire to identify with God, to become part of God, and to bridge the gap between man and God. In ancient Egypt their monarchs were thought to be begotten by the god Ammon who assumed the form of the reigning king and in that disguise had intercourse with the queen. The Baganda of central Africa provide their god with virgins. The offspring of these types of mystic unions among primitive tribes are considered to be children of God (see Sir James Frazer, The Golden Bough Chapter XII). The Torah's idea of monotheism is not merely to say God is one but to know that there is nothing in common between God and His created world. "To whom then would you liken me...says the Holy one (Isaiah 40:25)." To attempt to project onto God human traits or to imagine a relationship between God and man in a way that a child is produced through the union of God and a woman is idolatrous. This idea in any form, no matter how sophisticated, is an abomination. It stems from man's desire to reach God through identification with him. In Torah the only way to reach God is through a knowledge of him, which causes man to realize how far removed he is from Him.

This same desire is what is responsible for messianics -- the preoccupation of man with God's ultimate plans. This entertaining diversion from man's true task is an attempt on the part of man to gain importance and augment his own self-worth by becoming part of God's ultimate "triumph." It is really man's own triumph that he is seeking. All messianics has the germ of human egomania as its underlying basis. There is no difference in kind between the messianics of a David Koresh, A Sabbatai Zvi, or a Jesus of the New Testament. They are all attempts to make man the all-powerful center of the stage of human life. Although they disguise their true desires behind a religious veneer, their underlying motives are always apparent. For example, Jesus stated, "I am the way - the truth and the life." Sabbatai Zvi signed his name with the ineffable Hebrew name of God as David Koresh did. They all betray the powerful instinctual egomania of man-God identification.

In all the commandments of the Torah there is none that teaches us to try to involve ourselves in God's ultimate plans. All the commandments

teach us to concern ourselves with one thing - perfecting ourselves. Our teacher Moses asks what does the Lord your God ask of you? He answers clearly, "to fear the Lord your God, to walk in all His ways, and to love Him and to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, to keep the commandments of the Lord and His statutes." Similarly when the prophet asks what God wants of man he points to perfection: (Micah 6:8): "And what does the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with thy God?"

If we perfect ourselves through the ideas and ways of the torah we may play a role in God's ultimate plan for man, but if we give in to the agitation of our hearts and pursue our desire to be part of God's "grandiose apocalyptic scheme" we can be certain that we will not play any role in God's ultimate plan for mankind. Let us Bnei Noach and Bnei Israel redouble our efforts to gain perfection from Torah and leave God's plans to the only one who has knowledge of these plans - God himself. ■

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Justice of the Wicked

MATT SCHNEEWEISS

“When your enemy falls, be not glad, and when he stumbles, let your heart not rejoice – lest Hashem see and it be evil in His eyes, and He turn His anger from him [to you].” (Mishlei 24:17-18)

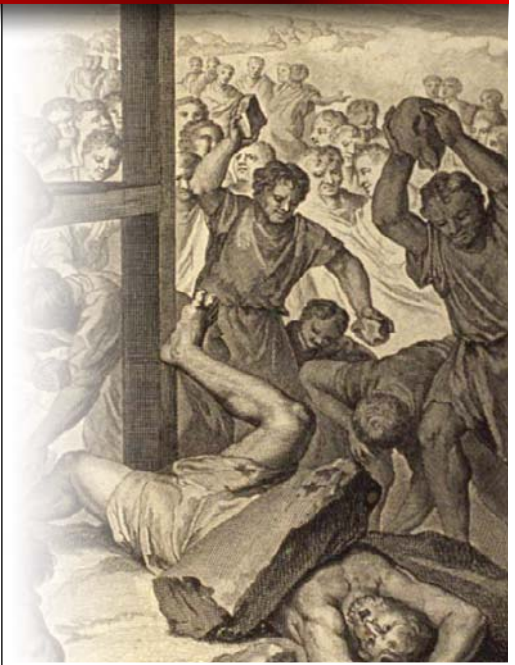
This verse presents several difficulties.

First of all, why shouldn't I be glad when my enemy falls? After all, the second verse says that Hashem is angry with him, implying that this “enemy” is an actual rasha (evildoer). Isn't it appropriate to rejoice at the downfall of a rasha? Secondly, the verse implies that as a consequence of my rejoicing, the same anger that Hashem had toward this rasha will be transferred unto me - what kind of justice is that?

I think that in order to understand this verse, we need to understand the rasha's philosophy of justice.

Every human being has a sense or philosophy of justice. Even young children feel that certain things actions are “right” and others are “wrong.” Of course, not everyone has the correct sense of justice. The only way to develop a correct sense of justice is through learning and practice of justice.

What is the rasha's sense, or philosophy, of justice? We are taught in Pirkei Avos (5:14): Someone who says, “What is mine is mine, and what is yours is mine” is a rasha. In his eyes, it is okay to steal from others, but someone who steals from him is behaving unjustly. To put it another way: deep down, the rasha says, “I am the measure of justice - actions which benefit or please me are just, and actions which harm or displease me are unjust.” It is this skewed, narcissistic philosophy of justice which allows the rasha to perpetrate the greatest evil.



A person can hate a rasha for two reasons. A tzadik (righteous person) or chacham (wise person) will hate the rasha because he understands the nature of evil and recognizes that this individual is an embodiment of that evil. Let us call this philosophical or objective hatred. However, the average person's hatred of the rasha stems from personal considerations: because the rasha has harmed him, or reminds him of his own imperfections, or because he himself is envious of the rasha's lifestyle and resents him for it, etc. Let us call this personal or subjective hatred.

Philosophical hatred is certainly appropriate for a rasha, and philosophical rejoicing is the correct response to his downfall. Our verse, however, is talking about personal hatred and joy. This is indicated the use of the term “your enemy” (as opposed to, “The city exults in the good of the righteous, and when the reshaim perish there is glad song” (11:10), which speaks of philosophical rejoicing).

What is wrong with feeling personal hatred toward a rasha?

Imagine a bully. Every day, this bully torments me. One day, I see him trip, twist his ankle, and embarrass himself in public. When he stumbles in this manner, there is a part of me that rejoices, saying, “Ha! Serves him right for tormenting me!” In other words, I feel that because he harmed me, he deserves to be harmed. King Solomon comes to teach us: that feeling of satisfaction stems from the exact same philosophy as the rasha. The rasha's feeling that “I am the measure of justice” is the same feeling which I experience when I rejoice over his downfall. At the moment I feel this sense of vengeful joy at the downfall of my enemy, I am no different than the rasha. As such, I will be subject to the same Divine wrath. ■



*Matt Schneeweiss authors the blog:
<http://kankanchadash.blogspot.com>*

Letters



Letters

from our

READERS



Please Veer to the "Right"

Omphile: Greetings Rabbi. Reading the article on Gematria, I read this, "When Moshe reiterated the Ten Commandments, he wasn't concerned with preserving Hashem's exact wording. Rather, his sole concern was conveying the ideas - ideas which could be conveyed in different words."

What then is the difference between Moshe in this case, and Betzalel? Isn't it true that the Torah

praised Betzalel for doing exactly as Hashem instructed him? He didn't decide to be creative. In addition, (I don't know if this applies), but I learnt from Rabbi Chait that you can't philosophize Halacha. (e.g. like what Korach tried to do)

Regards,
Omphile

Mesora: Betzalel was commanded in certain, precise activities and vessel constructions. Conversely, Moses was not commanded "how" to communicate what he did, or even "that" he should say what he did, which forms the boom of Deuteronomy. Thus, Betzalel was correct in not veering from commands to act with precision. And Moses too acted properly in reviewing God's commandments as he saw fit. There was no restriction on Moses' verbalization, as there was regarding the precise measurements and metals used in the Tabernacle's construction. ■

Life & Death

Reader: Dear Rabbi: I am a rav and dayan. I followed a reference to your site and have read with interest a number of your articles. I cannot say that I necessarily agree with everything that you wrote (and I have not read it all either) but you did say a number of courageous things that need saying. I would like to disagree with you on two points.

In regard to the ba'alath 'ov, you say that it was a lie and that the ba'alath 'ov knew that it was Shaul seeking Sh'mu'el and that is why she said what she said. This is certainly the opinion of the Rambam, which is quoted in Shulhan 'Aruch. On this statement the G'ra says, "philosophy awakened his error". Why did the G'ra make this statement precisely in this connection? Because the Gemara says clearly that she knew it was Sha'ul because the ba'alath 'ov sees the soul, but doesn't hear what is said, while the seeker hears but does not see, and she saw that the soul of Sh'mu'el came up head first as opposed to the usual feet first. She realized that this was in honor of Sha'ul who was the king. It is fairly clear from here that the Gemara understood that the story literally happened as stated, and that the ba'alath 'ov did successfully summon up the dead Sh'muel.

I am far from being a kabbalist or a seeker of magic. It is possible to be a rationalist and accept certain seemingly mystical happenings. They may

be akin to physics. If I run an electric current through water, hydrogen and oxygen are released. If I put certain metals in a solution of acid, electric current is formed. If I press certain buttons, I get answers from my computer. All of these things have rational explanations and are in line with the laws by which Hashem governs the natural world. It may be that the workings of the ba'alath 'ov are a physical fact of the creation.

Tsvi

Mesora: Rabbi, a wise Rabbi taught that the Gra's student stated that this Gra is not his style, and is a forgery. Please also see the long Radak on this account in Neveim.

Furthermore, the Ibn Ezra (Lev. 19:31) states that what the Torah forbids, such as consulting the dead, is forbidden since it is "fallacy and does not work": "Empty brained (people) state that were it not for the fact that conjurers and magic were actual truths, the Torah would not have prohibited it, but I say just the opposite of their words; for the Torah does not command against truth only what's false, and the proof is the idols."

Ibn Ezra says the Torah does not prohibit that which is true and works. The Torah prohibits only that which is a lie. This is why idolatry is prohibited, along with superstitions, and all assumed forces other than natural law, man's power, and God or His angels. The Baales Ove is also a lie: humans cannot resurrect the dead.

Radak (Samuel I, 28:25 towards the end): "...although the implications of the words of the Rabbis - blessed their memory - imply from the Talmud that the (idolatrous) woman resurrected Samuel, we do not accept these words when our intelligence tells us the opposite".

Radak is quite literally stating that any truth of the Ove is only "implied", but not what he holds. He rejects Saadia Gaon and Hai Gaon (at the end of that Radak) who he says understood the Baales Ove as literally performing resurrection. And since we are all demanded to use our own reasoning - as Hashem gave "each" of us reasoning - I agree with Radak's argument that if God wanted to communicate with Saul, He need not do so via Baales Ove, but could use prophetic dreams.

Finally, only God creates and takes life, and "taking life" means that the person is no longer available in communication to the living. So once God takes a life, it cannot partake in communication with this earthly existence. Baales Ove is a lie.

Radak and Saadia Gaon are at odds...one of them is wrong. There is no psak (ruling) here, so each of us - you and I - must choose based on our own reasoning. ■

(continued on next page)

Segregating Segulas

Janet: Dear Rabbi, While I agree with you one hundred percent about red strings, etc., I have a question in your refutation of segulas. You included reciting Tehillim, giving challah with blessings and checking mezuzos in with red strings. It seems to me that there are a few different categories here.

When it comes to giving challah with blessings, I think it might be construed either way. It could be viewed as a "segula" which might not be appropriate, or perhaps it could be viewed as taking on a mitzvah in the zechus of which the person should receive the refuah, etc. Isn't it dependent upon the person's thought process?

By checking mezuzos, I assume you mean as a result of a problem as opposed to the normal requirement. Don't people who do those things do it as a grasp to see if there is something amiss that they can correct in their performance of this mitzvah rather than as a segula? Perhaps, believing someone who says that there is something wrong may be a stretch, but if they on their own choose to check, is it really a denial of Hashem?

On the other hand, isn't reciting Tehillim really a form of prayer and beseeching Hashem as opposed to denying Him? Isn't it therefore an appropriate as opposed to inappropriate response?

To equate all of these with superstitions seems to be a stretch to me. I don't think that those who recite Tehillim do it as a superstition or a perceived guarantee of anything as opposed to a supplication for help.

I would be very obliged to hear your comments on this matter.

Janet Berlove

Mesora: Janet, you are correct, that the intent is the issue. Any person who feels doing an act – even a mitzvah – will cause fertility or the like, in engaging in idolatrous notions. But if one feels they earn merit by performing mezuzah for example, and through that merit, God might shed His providence over them, then this is fine, and actually recorded verbatim in the Shulchan Aruch. And again you are correct that checking a mezuzah to determine if it has become weathered and nullified is a proper act. Our argument against segulas is the practice of those who claim specific acts cause specific results. ■

Why Create?

Warren: Hi Rabbi. Firstly thank you for all your effort. Your web site has been very useful as I have challenged my Christian beliefs and find them lacking in many ways. You have provided for me brilliant articles and audio teaching that have answered many of my questions, and as a result no longer accept my past Christian theology.

I have a question that I would greatly appreciate your thoughts: We know that G-d is perfect. Now, being perfect, why did He create anything? The reasoning for this question is as follows; G-d being perfect, He would have no need or want for anything, hence the act of creating would seem to me to imply a need or desire which would indicate something not being perfect.

Again thank you and looking forward to your reply.

Warren

Mesora: Warren, to seek a "motive" as you do for God's acts is a futile pursuit, since He is not moved by motive, a human phenomenon. You incorrectly project onto God, a human quality. We don't know why he created anything, nor does God need a reason to act as man does. "Man cannot know God while alive". (Exod. 33:20) To quote Maimonides, this is a question for which man cannot offer any answer, other than "it is God's will". ■

Fallen Angels?

Reader: Dear Rabbi, When I left Christianity to follow the Truth of the Torah, and rest of Tanakh, I decided that if the Torah failed me in any way, then, there is no hope for humanity.

At the beginning of my new journey, I found myself in a place where I was constantly testing the teachings of the Torah. Every time, the teachings kept proving themselves to be truth. Then, I started to see the differences within Judaism's different groups and realized how normal and human Israel is. You see, I had a higher standard for all of Israel based on the Tanakh. What I didn't realize was that not all accept the authority of it.

I found that in the different groups many different issues were espoused by them, one of which is the soul superiority of B'nai Israel compared to

Noachides. I wanted to extend my thanks to you for standing up for what is right. You have dealt with the issue in a very valiant way and all because you know what the Torah says. There's a lot that I still have to learn, but I know Truth when I see it. If it is not Truth at first glance you have to dig into it and see if it is just a falsehood that only seems to be truth. In every case, real Truth will reveal itself.

I respect you for sticking to your guns and continuation for spreading Truth in your Newsletter. I pray that Hashem will bless you greatly in your life journey and your loved ones as well.

Now, I had question: why are there some rabbis who claim that in Genesis 4 we are getting a revelation of angels that went against Hashem's will to the point of getting kicked out of Heaven and have intercourse with the women of the time? Who are Uzza and Azazel?

Are we truly getting a description of "abnormal offsprings" being a result of such copulation?

In all honesty, this seems like folklore; therefore, I inquire for proof of such accounts to be possible. Does "benei elohim" mean in all truthfulness these angels that were "fallen" from heaven? Did the "giants" truly come out of this coming together that some rabbis claim?

Sorry, if I'm being ignorant or not willing to accept this as a Truth until proven. I just think that if this was something that was written in more detail in much later times, how these interpretations could be projected to a much earlier text?

My understanding is that the "benei elohim" is talking of the rulers or judges that became known as men of renown; thus, equaled to giants, which in ancient times were thought of as children of the gods. You see that being evident in Egyptian history, so it would make sense why the Torah would mention that these were merely men of renown and where not some form of supernatural being.

Again, if I'm wrong, I would like to know why.

Mesora: You are in consonance with Rashi who explains "Benei Elohim" (lit. "children of God") as "children of judges". The word "Elohim" is also used to refer to judges. Thus, no angels fell from heaven. It is merely describing the motive of those corrupted... it was due to their societal status as children of judges that led them to seize all they desired. ■

(continued on next page)

Letters

False Ideas

Larry: Rabbi: Rambam said, "...Christians falsely ascribe marvelous powers to Jesus the Nazarene...the resurrection of the dead and other miracles. Even if we would grant them for the sake of argument, we should not be convinced by their reasoning..."

This means that even if Rambam had seen Jesus rise from the dead with his own eyes, he would still prefer Aristotle's perceived "intellectual perfection" even though Rambam claimed that his own faith was grounded in Sinai revelations.

Mesora: Witnessing miracles cannot determine that $2+2=5$. It also cannot cause a denial of Sinai. Rabbi Reuven Mann gave a similar analogy: if Jesus were to resurrect the Twin Towers, and then claim Christianity is thereby true, we would not accept Jesus. For reason tells us Christianity is false, and nothing can alter that fact...not even a miracle. This is because a miracle has no relationship at all to the fallacy of Jesus, and claims regarding him.

Larry: You say that human perfection is not a Jewish birthright but a human accomplishment. Yet God told Job that only when he (Job) created his own universe would He (God) THEN concede that Job was righteous enough to save himself (Job 40:14).

Mesora: God's statement is to say, that the Creator is the only one who may determine what is just, and what is unjust. Thus, Job can only maintain his complaint on God's justice if Job were the creator...which he is not. God was not suggesting that Job could be the creator, and thus, have a superior birthright.

Larry: Could it be that Noachide Law was what God had in mind when He said, "Their lips do honor Me, but (they) have removed their heart far from Me, and their fear toward Me is like rote learning of human commands." (Isaiah 29:13)

Mesora: This is a critique of the "lip service" practice. Nothing more.

Larry: It sure seems that way because if God has no anthropomorphisms then He couldn't possibly have made Himself understood at Sinai. Thus any concept of God is merely a manmade concoction based on arrogance and all religions are indeed on par with Torah.

Mesora: If God commanded us to "Know Him", then it is within our capacity to gain some truthful insights concerning God's existence, although we don't know "what" He is. We can know something blocks the sun, if we see a shadow...although we did not turn around to see "what" was blocking the sun. Similarly, we know a Creator exists, as we witness creation. And through miracles and His Torah, we gain knowledge of His will.

Other religions are not based on proof, but on belief, so they have no comparison to Torah, which is based on the proof of Sinai, and not blind faith. Our Torah is God's word; all other religions are the corrupt lies of men. ■

Thank You

Eli: Rabbi, Just a brief note to let you know how very much I enjoy your writings. I really do learn something new every day and I share much with my wife that I have learned. It gives us quality time together discussing your views.

Today I shared your view on "moods" and she said she certainly agreed with you but that you had overlooked one very important aspect of moods. That being hormones.

Apparently there doesn't need to be a reason for a bad mood when a woman's hormones are acting up. The only solution to the problem then...is chocolate.

Also, I'm having a major problem with the validity of Talmud as Oral Law but will not bother you with it until I have exhausted your articles on Mesora.org.

Have a great day and thank you for the easy to understand way you write making it simple for we non-academics to understand. Sincerely, Eli

Mesora: You must thank Doug Taylor and Rabbi Moskowitz, the true authors of "Moods". ■

Untalented:
Without Blessing?

Bentzion: Thank you for your last answer to my question - very easy for you, but not so easy for me.

Reading your text about "World to Come", there came to mind the following doubt: are we new creations since we are born...without any existence before? If so, why do some people have more abilities than others from childhood and before any training, such as the knack to play musicals instruments, and others do not? Or people (like me) who know from childhood - and without any proper training - how to draw and use it to sustain ourselves, and others who try it and do not succeed...how is this? Who decides about those special abilities: God? Or this is merely biological? Do those humans who receive from God these special abilities that provide for them a better life more blessed than others? And those who don't: are they devoid of this blessing? Yes, no, and why? I hope I expressed myself properly.

Thank you again,

Bentzion

Mesora: Yes, every infant is a new creation; both his body and soul are new creations. We recite this each morning. Our abilities can be innate, with inclinations as God wishes; or as genes determine. Or our abilities can be learned. If God determines the abilities as He did with King Solomon, in this case, He gave us Torah context to study why He did so. If God gives abilities from youth, we cannot say with any certainty why He did so.

But a person is not without God's blessings, even if he has no talents. If one lives in accord with Torah, He has God's blessings. While an accomplished artist who denies Torah will live without God's blessings. His magnificent painting skill is of no value to his soul. God has many means to sustain man. Talents is just one of them.

So "blessings" must not be understood as the talents we possess, but rather, if we are living in line with God's will. Only such a person has blessing. ■

Letters

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

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*A heartfelt Mazel Tov my dear
friend Ari Spiegel on his recent
engagement to Dalya!*

-Marshall

Answer:

"A gold ring in the nose of a pig, [so too is] a beautiful woman with poor character". (Mishley 11:22)

Shlomo HaMelech means this: in both cases, there is an essence, and an accidental feature. The essence is the pig; so no accidental adornment can compensate for its gross nature. So too is a beautiful woman with a putrid personality: her essence is her character, and her beauty is only skin-deep and cannot compensate for her internal flaws. The king advises us to value the essence.