



Jupiter at 534 million miles from Earth.
Eastward winds reach 250 miles per hour.

Mars at 100 million miles from Earth

Saturn at 904 million miles from Earth.
Eastward winds reach 1000 miles per hour.

*"Praise Him sun and moon, praise Him
all bright stars, for He commanded,
and they were created."*

King David: Psalm 148

ESTD
1997

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

JewishTimes

Volume I, No. 28...Aug. 16, 2002

WWW.MESORA.ORG/JEWISHTIMES.PDF

Download and Print Free

IN THIS ISSUE:

ADAM'S SIN AND PUNISHMENT	1, 3, 4
KNOWLEDGE AND FALSE BELIEFS	1, 5
BLESSING ON THE NEW MOON	1, 4
PARSHA: FEMALE CAPTIVE	2
CONVERSION: FALSE VIEWS	5

SUGGESTED READINGS:

SEE THESE AND OTHER ARTICLES AT OUR SITE

Maimonides' 13 PRINCIPLES

THE BASIC FOUNDATIONS WHICH ALL JEWS
MUST KNOW AS TRUE. WE URGE YOU TO READ THEM:
www.mesora.org/13principles.html

God's Existence Belief or Proof?

www.mesora.org/belieforproof.html

God's Land Without God?

AN OPEN LETTER TO THE JEWISH COMMUNITY:
www.mesora.org/openletter/openletter2.html

Knowledge and False Beliefs

AVRAHAM B. SIMON

Many people today feel that there is nothing wrong with different religions and ways of life that people lead. This opinion assumes that everyone is correct and living according to truth as long as it doesn't physically harm anyone. There is no such thing as a false belief or a wrong opinion. If a person wants to worship a certain god or live an instinctual lifestyle, then he should do it. If it feels good then it must be good (again, as long as it doesn't physically harm anyone). What position does the Torah take regarding this notion?

(continued on page 5)

Adam's Sin and Punishment

RABBI ISRAEL CHAIT

In order to appreciate the entire sequence of events concerning man's creation, we must analyze the appropriate verses.

In Genesis, chapter two, verse seven, it states, "Then the Lord G-d formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul." This verse depicts man's origin and reflects that man's existence emerged as a living soul, "nefesh chayah". The phrase "living soul" is significant and must be analyzed. Shortly after man's creation, man was charged with a task. Verse 15 states "And the Lord God took the man and put him into the garden of Eden to serve it and to watch it." In the following verses, G-d charged man with his first commandment. Man was allowed to eat from all the trees of the garden except from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. From this Tree of Knowledge man was expressly prohibited from eating. G-d thereby warned man that on the day he ate from the Tree of Knowledge, he would surely perish. It was at this juncture, after G-d gave man this stern warning about the Tree of Knowledge, that He made the following observation (verse 18). "And the Lord G-d said, 'It is not good that man should be alone, I will make a helpmate for him.'"

It is puzzling that this verse concerning man's discontent in being alone is placed after the warning about the Tree of Knowledge. It would at first seem that this statement would have more logically been made immediately following man's creation since it reflects the nature of man's existence. Furthermore, the verses following this observation seem incongruous. These subsequent verses discuss the creation

(continued on page 3)



IN THE GARDEN OF EDEN, WHY DID GOD BRING ALL THE ANIMALS TO ADAM TO HAVE HIM NAME THEM?

(Think for yourself before you read the answer.)

Answer: As you will read in this week's issue, God desired man involve himself in a life of wisdom, which is greatly different than a life of morality. Naming animals requires that one define peculiarities of each species via analysis and definition. God attempted to submerge Adam in such a life by affording him opportunity to study creation by naming the animals. Clarify the distinction between true/false knowledge, and good/bad knowledge. Only the former teaches man intellectual truths.

Have your children email us with their questions: questions@mesora.org

Blessing Upon the New Moon

RIVKA OLENICK

"They are joyous and glad to perform the will of their Creator the Worker of Truth Whose work is truth. From the blessing of the New Moon.

Chazal tell us that the Jewish women refused to give up their jewelry in participation of the creation and the worship of the Golden Calf (Gemara Yoma 66b). They were given as a gift on Rosh Chodesh, to abstain from all their work. The women were given the task of publicizing the day and in doing so should refrain from their work. It is not that work is absolutely forbidden or prohibited, because men may work, rather, it is in publicizing the day we should focus our attention to the special mitzvos belonging to Rosh Chodesh; special prayer, an additional Torah reading and the sacrifice brought on that day. Although we don't bring any sacrifices, we do recite prayers and read an additional portion from the Torah, and today women still refrain from their work. The Code of Jewish Laws calls this "a beautiful custom to be preserved. We don't mark off the day as "just another day. To the contrary, on the Sabbath preceding Rosh Chodesh the blessing of the new month is said. At that time we are already preparing ourselves in anticipation of the new month. So even in that preparation itself Rosh Chodesh has special significance. Women abstaining from their work expresses that this unique day is designated for praise of the Creator and we recognize Him as the Master of the Universe. We can only have this recognition of God's existence through his works and the moon symbolizes this for us. The moon is an incredible body that revolves around the earth and is part of a complicated universe that didn't just happen. The moon receives its light from sun, not from itself and God created it to be this way. God created the moon to reflect in the physical world so that we could see it. He gave it to us so that we could come closer in recognizing how profound His works are, as we are part of His created world, His created beings. We can't ignore the moon, in fact we are drawn to it, we stare at it and as we look at it with wonder we should ask: what is the moon's purpose in relation to me and the Jewish Nation?

(continued on page 4)

Parshas Ki-Tzaytzay

Yifas Toar

THE FEMALE CAPTIVE

Transcribed by students

RABBI ISRAEL CHAIT

The Torah teaches us many interesting halachos with respect to wartime situations. One of the most intriguing areas is that of the Yifas Toar. These Halachos are applicable when God grants the Israelites a victory over their enemies and they capture female captives. The Torah tells us that when an Israelite soldier sees a beautiful woman captive who he desires, he is permitted to marry her. However there are many requirements prescribed in Deuteronomy chapter 21 verses 10 through 15 that must be undertaken prior to marriage. He must shave her head, pare her nails, and wait a period of nine months time. After adhering to all these requirements he can consummate the marriage. Rashi tells us that these prerequisites are required in order that she should no longer be appealing to him. In fact Rashi tells us that eventually he will hate her.

This entire incident in the Torah raises many puzzling questions. The most bothersome problem is how does the Torah permit a marriage to a gentle. Rashi on verse 11 attempts to eradicate these difficulties. Rashi tells us that the Torah is only speaking with respect to man's evil inclination. If God would not permit him to marry this captive, he would ultimately disregard the halacha and marry her anyway. Rashi continues and states that if he does marry her, it will invariably eventuate in his hating her and ultimately they will have a child who will be a stubborn and rebellious son. Rashi is obviously bothered by the notion that the Torah grants a reprieve to the warrior and allows him to enter a relationship which is strictly forbidden under normal circumstances. However there are many nagging questions which remain. Why does the Torah grant a reprieve and allow the person to indulge his evil inclination. A Torah Jew must raise his level of conduct to function on a higher spiritual level of kedushah whereby he uses his Tzelem Elokim to live a life of chochmah. Simply because a person may fail is not sufficient justification to allow a person to surrender to his desires. What does Rashi mean when he states the Torah is only talking against man's evil inclination. Many of the laws of the Torah address the yetzer hara. A person cannot always indulge his appetitive desires. Before a person eats meat he must perform shechita. The Torah recognizes man's instinctual desires, his evil inclinations, but teaches us to control them. Why is Yifas Toar so unique that the Torah allows us to surrender? Furthermore how does Rashi know that he will ultimately hate her. Perhaps he will have a happy marriage? Rashi continues his prognostications and states that they will eventually have a son who is a Ben Sorer U'Moreh. Maybe their son will be a prince in Israel. This Rashi seems incongruous to Rashi's typical method of interpretation as

Rashi seems to be more concerned with future events. However upon closer scrutiny we can appreciate the beauty of Rashi's psychological insights into human behavior.

There is a Gemara in Tractate Nedarim 9B which can give us insight into Yifas Toar. The Gemara quotes a statement by Rabbi Shimon the Tzaddik wherein he exclaims that he never ate from the trespass offering of a Nazir who was defiled except for one time. There was a Nazir who came from the South Country and I saw that he had beautiful eyes, a handsome appearance, and had thick locks of hair. I asked this Nazir why did you destroy your beautiful hair. He replied that he was a shepherd for his father. One day when he drew water from the well he gazed upon his reflection whereby he recognized that his evil desires were driving him out of this world. The Nazirite exclaimed to himself, rashah why are you so haughty in a world that is not yours. Your ultimate destiny is to become worms and dust. The Nazirite swore at that moment that he would shave his beautiful locks of hair for the sake of heaven. Rabbi Shimon thereby states that he arose and kissed this Nazirite's head and exalted, may there be many Nazirites like you in Israel.

Rabbi Shimon is teaching us an interesting insight into human behavior. His reluctance to eat from the sacrifice of a defiled Nazirite was because he recognized the impetus behind a Nazirites vow. Most people are guided by their emotions. Therefore a Nazirite usually feels compelled to enter Nazirism because he feels guilty. He is sensitive to the temptations of the physical world and feels that he cannot control himself under his own free will. He therefore undertakes a vow to become a Nazir to repress his urges. Rabbi Shimon is teaching us that this is not the proper way for an individual to become a Nazir. The Mesilas Yesharim teaches us that a person cannot jump into righteousness. Righteousness is not an overnight transformation resulting from an emotional frenzy. Rather it requires hard work and the inner discipline to change oneself based upon one's intellectual conviction. The Yerushalmi teaches us this concept by telling us that a person who does not enjoy certain fruits of this world is punished. A person cannot deny his instinctual nature and aspire to attain perfection by simply repressing his urges. Change is a gradual process which demands greater knowledge. A person must appreciate that he has physical desires and must satisfy them in accordance with halachah but only as a means to help him to live life based on his true essence. Therefore Rabbi Shimon as a general principle refrained from eating the sacrifice of a Nazirite. Change cannot occur through the denial of one's emotional makeup. It requires recognition of one's nature and a harnessing of his energies to better himself.

However Rabbi Shimon did eat from the sacrifice of this one particular Nazir. He recognized that this individual was unique. He undertook the Nazirite vow because he possessed the intellectual conviction to realize that the world was not his. He recognized the lure of the physical was transitory and that God, the creator of the world, is truly the

source of reality.

It is interesting to note the question that this Nazirite asked of himself. He questioned his haughtiness. This question seems to be misplaced. It would appear that his question should have been phrased in terms of his instinctual desires. Why did the Nazirite question his arrogance.

The question was an astute one and is a reflection of the Nazir's appreciation of the forces that were overwhelming him and causing him to lead a life pursuing the instinctual pleasures. Most people do not commit sins simply because of their physical desires, albeit extremely powerful. A person is blessed with the intellectual capacity to recognize the good and live his life accordingly. However there is another major component of chet. This stems from man's ego. Every individual has an image of himself or an image of what he professes to be. This image or ego/ideal is a powerful ally of the yetzer horah and many times entices the person to adopt a particular lifestyle. A person is constantly aware, although perhaps unconsciously, of his transitory existence and he takes refuge and security in this ego/ideal. Therefore this Nazir questions his arrogance. He was extremely good looking and found security in his image as a playboy. The compelling force in his life was this false image as a handsome and suave gentleman. It is only after he contemplated regarding this image was he capable of appreciating that it was a false perception stemming from his ego. He therefore questioned his arrogance, recognizing that the world is not his. The world is a reflection of chochmas haborey, and man is ultimately destined to be nothing more than dust and worms. Rabbi Shimon concluded that this Nazir had undertaken his commitment in the ideal framework.

We can now appreciate Rashi's insights into the Yefas Toar. The Torah is speaking with respect to man's evil inclination. However the Torah is not just addressing itself to man's innate physical lust. That part of the Yetzer Harah man must attempt to control, as in all cases, guided by the precepts of the halachic system. The Torah is dealing with the lure of man's ego. The soldier at the height of his conquests on the battlefield is enraptured with his own image as a great warrior. Thus his desire for the beautiful captive is not merely an expression of his physical lust but rather the result of the ego/ideal as the all-powerful conquering warrior. Normally man can partake of the physical in the proper halachic framework. He recognizes it merely as a means enabling him to continue his struggle in achieving perfection as a Torah Jew. Our forefather Isaac enjoyed the pottage that his son Esau brought him. However, this enjoyment did not detract from his perfection, but on the contrary, it comforted him and allowed him to continue his essential existence as a Talmid Chocham. In contrast the warrior cannot justify ravishing the Yefas Toar as a means for his perfection. This is an absurdity. Obviously, he was drawn to her as a captive, as an expression of his image as the omnipotent conqueror. Therefore the Torah was speaking only with respect to the Yetzer

Horah. The Torah recognized the compelling force of this image and realized that if it were to forbid the Yefas Toar, he would still sin. Thus the Torah allows him to take the Yefas Toar as his wife. However, the Torah was cognizant that the image that a warrior possesses is amplified on the battlefield amidst the ravages of battle. After the war is over and the sweet smell of victory has dissipated, this ego/ideal will not be such a coercive force. Thus the Torah commands that you should shave her head and pare her nails. These requirements are necessary prior to your taking her as your wife. They are required in order to make her disgusting to him. The Torah appreciated that by the time you are allowed to marry her you will no longer be overwhelmed by the image of the ego/ideal. Hence, Rashi teaches us that ultimately you will hate her. The warrior, after he returns home to his wife, will feel guilty returning with the Yefas Toar. She will resent him and mourn her family that he killed on the battlefield. He will likewise resent her sudden intrusion into his family life. His guilt will not be expressed consciously as a wrongful action on his part, but rather will serve as a basis for his projection of hatred and resentment upon her as a wrongful intruder. Therefore Rashi is not attempting to prophesize by predicting his eventual enmity toward the Yefas Toar. Rather, Rashi is teaching us a valuable insight into human psychology and tachbulosav shel yetzer horah.

Rashi further comments that the child of such a union will be a Ben Sorer U'Moreh. The Torah teaches us to respect one's father and mother. The respect of one's father is mentioned first because it is more difficult for the son to respect the father. The father represents the authority figure; he teaches his son Torah. However the son will naturally respect the mother as she is the one who comforts him. In contrast, the father's relationship with the son is often characterized by rebellion of the son. This rebelliousness is usually quashed by the mother, whom he naturally respects, since she stands together with her husband in a united front. She will likewise demand that he respect the father. In the situation of a Yefas Toar the son will rebel against the father as the authority figure and as his teacher of Torah. The mother will not bolster the father's authority, since their relationship as husband and wife is one of resentment and hatred. Besides, she will not respect the father as a teacher of Torah because she does not appreciate the Torah life. Their hatred will serve to foster the rebelliousness of the son as he attempts to play off one parent against the other. Their unstable family life will facilitate the son's rebelliousness and it will eventually become his standard mode of behavior. Therefore Rashi teaches us that the offspring of this marriage will be a Ben Sorer U'Moreh.

We can now appreciate the Torah's remarkable insight into human behavior as elucidated by Rashi's insightful remarks. The Torah's logic is compelling by demonstrating that if one succumbs to the temptations of a Yefas Toar it will ultimately cause him much travail. ■

Adam's Sin and Punishment

RABBI ISRAEL CHAIT

(continued from page 1) □

of the animals and man's mastery over the animal kingdom. Verses 19 & 20 state "And out of the ground, the Lord G-d formed every beast of the field and every fowl of the air, and brought them unto the man to see what he would call them; and whatsoever the man would call every living creature, that was to be the name thereof. And the man gave names to all cattle, and to the fowl of the air, and to every beast of the field, but for Adam there was not found a helpmate for him." In addition to the seemingly questionable nexus between the verses, we can pose a few very basic questions. Following the commandment concerning the Tree of Knowledge, God made the statement that it wasn't good for man to be alone. He then proceeded to create the animal kingdom. Why then didn't G-d create woman at the very inception of the creation of man? If it was apparent to God that man was not happy alone, then why didn't he create woman immediately? What was the compelling reason that God refrained from creating woman until after man was placed in charge of the Garden of Eden and prohibited from partaking of the Tree of Knowledge? It is obvious from the sequence of the verses that God chose not to create woman until after He had created the animal kingdom and placed man in its charge. Furthermore, the entire account of G-d's creation of the animal kingdom and man's mastery of the animals is concluded with a repetition of man's dissatisfaction with his solitude.

When God ultimately created woman from man, it is interesting to note that man did not name her at the time of her creation as he did with the animals. Rather, it was only after the incident of the snake (which enticed them to eat from the Tree of Knowledge) that man gave woman a name. Chapter 3, verse 20 states, "And the man called his wife's name Eve; because she was the mother of all living."

In order to fully appreciate the order of events regarding creation, we must first make the following observations in reference to man's nature. These insights will help give us a better understanding of the account of creation, and they will also afford us an appreciation of the complexity of the nature of man. With these observations, we can gain a new perspective on man's constant lifelong struggle to achieve perfection as a moral being.

Maimonides posed a famous

question regarding the denial of man of the fruit from the Tree of Knowledge. Verses 16 and 17 state, "And the Lord G-d commanded the man saying: of every tree in the garden thou may freely eat, but the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil thou shall not eat of it, for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shall surely die." As Maimonides observed, based on these verses alone, it would seem that G-d was withholding from man the ability to discern good from evil. This is rather puzzling, since the pursuit of knowledge is the primary objective of the Talmud Chacham. Was it really G-d's intention to deny knowledge to man? This also contrasts the traditional Judaic belief that G-d's greatest gift to man was his intellectual faculty. An analysis of relevant verses can help us examine man's true nature and determine that quite the contrary is true.

The aforementioned verse 7 states that G-d created man as a living soul, "nefesh chaya". The term "chaya" is precise. It reflects the instinctual component of man, the "yetzer hara". This term, "chaya" is also used to reflect the instinctual, as animals are also referred to as "chaya". In his Mishna Torah, in the Laws of Forbidden Foods (Chapter 2, Law 3), Maimonides used this term "chaya" to reflect the instinctual, which is the essential component of an animal's nature. Thus, it is evident that the composition of man's nature includes the instinctual. As previously questioned, it is now significant that man was charged with his first commandment shortly after his creation. This evidences the other component of human nature.

Man was to watch and guard the Garden of Eden and to enjoy the fruit of the trees as his source of nourishment. However, he was prohibited by the word of G-d from partaking of the Tree of Knowledge. This task and divine commandment evidences the other aspect of man's nature. Man was given the gift of intelligence, and thus was capable of observing G-d's commandment. Therefore, it is apparent that G-d created man with a dual nature. Man not only possesses the instinctual drive (akin to the animal kingdom), but he also possesses the intellectual faculty which enables him to discern what is good and to observe the dictates of G-d. This dual aspect of man's nature is the primary message of these verses. However, these perfunctory inferences regarding man's nature are also important tools which enable us to more clearly comprehend the entire sequence of creation. Man possesses a hybrid essence of the intellectual and the instinctual. G-d's command not to eat from the Tree of Knowledge was an

appeal to man's intellect. However, at this point in time man lacked a sense of morality, of what is "tov", good, and what is "ra", evil. God forbade man to eat the fruit in order to ensure that man would function in accordance with his intellectual abilities. However, once man disobeyed this command, he was destined to constantly struggle with the passions of the instinctual, which would always be in conflict with his intellectual nature, his yetzer hara.

By disobeying this command and partaking of the forbidden fruit, man abandoned his intellect for the appeal of the fantasy. From this point on, man was destined to face the eternal struggle of "tov v'ra", good and evil.

In verse 18 after G-d appealed to man's intellect by admonishing him not to eat of the forbidden fruit, G-d then made the observation that it was not good for man to be alone - man needed a helpmate. G-d was cognizant that man was unable to channel all of his energies to the intellectual. In such a state, man's energies would soon have been frustrated. By His statement in verse 18, God acknowledged that it is not good for man to be alone, for such a state would lead to the frustration of man's instinctual energies. This observation is attested to by the subsequent series of verses. Man utilized his innate intellectual abilities to name, classify, dominate and rule the animal kingdom. It was during the performance of this task that man observed that each animal was capable of satisfying its instinctual desires. Man therefore attempted to satisfy his own instinctual needs, but was unable to find a helpmate. Man realized that his dual nature could not be satisfied with an entity whose entire essence was instinctual. Through his cognitive efforts, he became aware of his inability to channel all of his instinctual energies into intellectual gratification. Therefore, the sequence of events leading to the creation of woman is more understandable. Although man was created with both instinctive and intellectual drives, it was only through his own efforts that he came to realize his inability to channel his total instinctual energies into the world of the intellectual. It was only after he made this observation, did G-d then create woman. Verses 21 and 22 state, "And the Lord G-d caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; and He took one of his ribs and closed up the place with flesh instead thereof. And the rib which the Lord G-d had taken from the man, made He a woman and brought her unto the man."

It is not coincidental that G-d created woman from man's rib. Man was incapable of satisfying his instinctual desires with a being that operated solely

in the world of the instinctual. Such a relationship would only be physical, and by definition could not be enduring or fulfilling. When G-d created woman, man was not solely attracted by his instinctual desires, but there was a psychological attraction as well. In verse 23 man comments as follows in reference to his wife, "bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh." Man's attraction to woman stemmed from his love of his own self. Man's narcissistic desires fostered the relationship that developed between man and woman. Man is a complex being, and even his instinctual drives are inexorably intermixed with his psychological awareness. This explains the medrash (allegory) that man originally had two forms from which the woman originated. This basis of man's attraction for woman also serves to shed light on the reason why woman was not created at the time of man's creation. Man's instinctual energies were not capable of fulfillment in a purely instinctual relationship - a psychological attraction was also required.

It is therefore apparent that the entire creation of man was designed by G-d in a manner which allowed man's nature to play a role in the emerging sequence of events of creation. Man was created with a yetzer hatov, the intellectual faculty whose objective for man is to live a life guided by wisdom and morality. However, man was also bestowed with a yetzer hara, instinctual needs and desires. As a result, man's libido could not be satisfied by directing all of his energies to the intellectual. Because of his hybrid nature, man discovered that he was incapable of satisfying his physical needs and desires in a purely instinctual relationship. His excess energies which were not absorbed by the intellectual were frustrated and could not reach gratification. This gratification required a relationship whereby there was also a psychological attraction. Thus G-d created woman, a blessing from G-d which allowed man and woman to function in a harmonious manner.

It is only after we observe the emergence of human nature through the events of creation that we can properly analyze the sin of eating from the Tree of Knowledge. Prior to the sin, man's energies were primarily directed to intellectual endeavors. Man took charge of his surroundings and used his intellectual abilities to master the environment. However, the excess instinctive energy which could not be satisfied by intellectual endeavors was channeled into a healthy relationship with Eve. Man's energies were directed

(continued on page 4)

Adam's Sin and Punishment

RABBI ISRAEL CHAIT

(continued from page 3)

□
towards phenomena that were physically present. By commanding man not to eat of the Tree of Knowledge, G-d was disciplining man's instinctual drives and demonstrating that the instinctual must always be subordinated and controlled by the intellectual.

Our mesora (oral tradition) tells us that the fruits of the Tree of Knowledge were not unique. Its appeal was solely based on the prohibition to indulge in them. It appealed to man's yetzer hara, his desires. Verse 6 states, "And the woman saw that the food was good to eat and that it was a delight for the eyes and a tree to be desired to make one wise. She took of the fruit and ate it, and gave also to her husband with her, and he did eat it." Maimonides noted that this verse evidences the breadth of man's desires. The tree was an ordinary tree, yet the appeal of the fantasy was overwhelming. The tree was appealing to the eye, though common, and was good to eat, though never tasted. Thus, by partaking of the tree, man succumbed to the allurements of the fantasy. Before the sin, man's energies were directed to the physical phenomena that were in his presence. Our rabbis teach us that prior to the sin, man's evil inclination was controllable, but after the sin, there was a qualitative change. Man's instinctual desires were internal and external. Before the sin, man's libido naturally was attracted to wisdom, and his energies were automatically drawn to thought. Subsequent to the sin, man's energies naturally flowed to the physical. By indulging the fantasy, man incorporated into his personality the vehicle by which the energies of man are drawn to the physical.

The enticements of the tree and the entrapment of man's imagination allowed man's energies to become fixated on the physical. This sin shaped the human personality for the millennium. Man was doomed, for at the moment his energies became fixated on the physical, it became a constant source of man's attention. His energies became attached to the physical and naturally flowed to it. Man's sin molded his soul. Mankind was destined to be ensnared by fantasy, and his energies would from then on be guided by the imagination. It would seek its initial gratification

from the world of the physical. Thus, down through the generations to our present time, whenever man sins and is overwhelmed by the desires of the instinctual, he too molds his soul. He becomes drawn to and affected by the trappings of physical pleasures, his imagination overwhelms him, and as a result, distances himself from G-d. After the sin, man's only hope for salvation is to rechannel his energies. A wise man is one whose thought process is not influenced or corrupted by the instinctual. However, the ordinary individual who cannot properly channel his energies away from the instinctual, his emotions cloud his intellect and the physical corrupts his thinking process.

In any event, man has the free will to withdraw the energies which are now naturally attracted to the physical by the power of fantasy, and can redirect them towards the intellectual. By choosing such a path, man also molds his soul, directs his energies and becomes attached to and leads the life of a chacham (wise man) and becomes close to God. A task such as this is monumental, and requires great conviction. Battling instinctual drives requires great fortitude, intellect, and inner strength. The appellation of a "gibor", a strong person, is reserved for one who conquers the evil inclination. However, G-d, in punishing man for the sin of eating from the Tree of Knowledge, has armed man with the ability, if he exercises his free will wisely, to be victorious in this battle.

G-d's punishment is different from that of man. A punishment from G-d is given to help benefit man. An analysis of the verses subsequent to the sin can help us to understand the punishment and its ramifications with respect to the human personality. In chapter 3, verse 7 states, "And the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths." Prior to the sin, the Torah explicitly tells us that they were not ashamed of their nakedness. The Torah is teaching us by contrasting these facts, that prior to the sin, man did not experience embarrassment. Shame is a function of man's conscience. Before man sinned, man's energies were naturally directed to chachma, to intellectual pursuits. After the sin, man fell prey to the instinctual. The intellectual was overpowered by the instinctual. However, man now had an additional ally to help combat the forces of the physical . . . his conscience. The conscience of man helps him to determine good from evil. The yetzer

hatov, man's good inclination, helps man to withdraw his energies from the world of the physical and redirect it to the world of chachma, wisdom. However, before man sinned, he did not possess the ability to discern good from evil. His mind was naturally drawn to the intellectual. After the sin man's energies flow first to the physical, which is capable of paralyzing him. G-d thereby instilled in man a conscience to help him progress into the world of the ideational and not stagnate in the world of the physical. It is only with the aid of the yetzer hatov, the ability to discern good, that man can use his free will and channel his energies to the acquisition of wisdom. It is therefore no coincidence that immediately after G-d pronounced His punishment for the sin (and man was endowed with both good and evil inclinations), man began to utilize his conscience to channel his energies properly. First, he experienced shame and covered his nakedness. Then, as chapter 3, verse 20 relates, "And the man called his wife Eve, because she was the mother of all living." It seems incongruous that this occurs immediately after the pronouncement of man's punishment. However, the reason is now readily apparent. This manifests that man was using the yetzer hatov to help direct his energies towards wisdom. He exercised his intelligence to classify and name his wife. It was a definitional exercise that required his intellectual abilities. From this we can ascertain that a punishment from G-d is unique, as it is executed for the benefit of man. This particular event bestowed man with good and evil inclinations. It is only with the aid of the yetzer hatov that man can overcome the pitfalls of sin and can withdraw his energies away from the physical and utilize his intellect to live a life based on wisdom. □

Blessing Upon the New Moon

RIVKA OLENICK

(continued from page 1)

Every month we are given the opportunity to look at the full moon and once again be inspired by the Hand of God, by His work in the world, not only now, but in His works of all of creation. We look at the moon and we are in awe of God's mastery of the universe. He created us and gave us every possible way on

the earth, individually and through each other to "Serve Him with gladness and exultation, as it says in Psalms 100:2. We often forget this idea and get so caught up in our "own world" and yet God gives us a chance each month to renew ourselves with the realization that we have a purpose in His world which is to align ourselves with the will of the Creator. We were created only for this purpose, recognizing that truth comes only through the knowledge that God gave us access to. Torah knowledge about the Forefathers who lived lives of truth, in their deeds and in their trials we learn from them and they give us hope and inspiration to survive individually and as a nation. I would like to say that when a person gazes intently at the moon's full reflection one's mind is illuminated, lit up by the realization of one's free will and the ability to activate it. Use of our real free will can bring us closer to repentance and further away from sin even though we are never completely free from sin. We see the moon as analogues to ourselves, the Jewish people and as the moon goes through stages of such smallness to such greatness, so can we. We can renew ourselves by turning to the vast and great knowledge that the Torah offers us, and by working to change and remove our flaws, which is always within our capability, according to the Rambam who states: "For in every situation a person has the choice of changing from good to bad, and from bad to good. The choice is in his hands. (From Chapter 8 of the Rambam's Eight Chapters/Shemonah Perakim). The mitzvah of Kiddush HaChodesh, blessing of the new month provides each of us with the opportunity to personally reflect with the hope and motivation that in changing and renewing ourselves we have the additional hope and belief that God will bring about the Ultimate Redemption. The Messiah will help restore us as the Jewish people to be One Nation with the rebuilding of the Temple and once again regain our leadership as "the light unto the other nations. With God's help Klal Yisrael will be whole again and shine brilliantly on the earth like the moon shines over God's universe.

"To the moon He said that it should renew itself as a crown of splendor for those borne (by Him) from the womb, those who are destined to renew themselves like it, and to glorify their Molder for the name of His glorious Kingdom. Blessed are You, Hashem Who renews the months." □

Knowledge and False Beliefs

AVRAHAM B. SIMON

(continued from page 1)

Can a person have a false belief? Are there many different ways to reach G-d? Should a person live his life according to the way he sees fit?

The Torah records the lives of many different personalities. We learn about personalities such as Jacob and Moses. Alongside them we learn about Lavan and Pharaoh. Upon study of these various personalities we see that the Torah considers some as righteous and some as evil. If the opinion of today's society is correct, how could certain people be considered evil? Weren't they living according to the way which made them feel good? Perhaps you will argue that these people harmed others. However, if we look carefully at the Torah, we see that many of them did not harm anyone. Esau, for example, was considered evil yet the Torah does not say anywhere that he actually harmed anyone. He merely desired to kill Jacob. A person is not evil by simply desiring to do something. He must act it out. How, then, could some people be considered evil if they did not cause others harm? The answer is their way of life was corrupt. They were living according to principles, which are false. The personalities that the Torah depicts as evil led their lives guided by their emotions. The greatness of their evil is that they used their minds to accomplish their emotional desires instead of using their minds as their guide in perceiving reality and letting their emotions fall in line with that reality. A person does not have to harm others to be considered evil. He becomes evil by living an instinctual lifestyle.

If, then, we accept the fact that there are certain ways of life that are evil, why did the Torah record them? Why didn't the Torah just record the lives of those which it considers righteous so that we may learn how to live according to their ideals? Why do we have to know about Lavan, Esau and Pharaoh? The answer is obvious. In order to live lives according to true principles we must understand what the false principles are. G-d wants us to study Esau's purely instinctual life, which precluded him from being a partner in the Nation of Israel. We must learn about Bilaam's great desire for fame and fortune, Lavan's deceitful ways and Haman's megalomania. We must understand that these lifestyles are based on false ideas and they are harmful to a person. If we do not gain this insight, we are bound to follow them. Many people today are no different than Esau, Lavan or Bilaam. They are steeped in lifestyles of greed and ego. Granted, the emotions that lead a person after these things are powerful and we all slip on occasion, however, G-d has given us the tools to overcome them. Through careful study of the various personalities of the Torah, both righteous and wicked, we gain deep insights as to the correct way to live. We can learn how many of our emotions are false and should not be followed

just because it feels good.

Most people will acknowledge that a person living a life of greed and egotism is not living according to Torah ideals. Yet, the Torah considers idolatry as the greatest evil. We are constantly commanded not to be involved in its practices. Throughout the ages our prophets risked their lives warning us to abandon its various forms. It involves the greatest falsehood; corrupt notions of G-d. Very often idol worshipers don't harm anyone. They simply perform their rituals, say their prayers and go home. Yet, the Torah commands us again and again to obliterate all traces of idolatry from our midst. It is the cause of our exile as it says, "And all the nations will say, 'For what reason did G-d do so to this land And they will say 'Because they forsook the covenant of G-d and they went and served the gods of others gods that they knew not and He did not apportion to them. So G-d's anger flared against the land, to bring upon it the entire curse that is written in this Book. And G-d removed them from upon their soil and He cast them to another land, as this very day' (Deuteronomy 29; 23-27)." Those who worshiped the Golden Calf didn't harm anyone, yet we see what happened to them. The Jews upon entering Israel for the first time were instructed to wipe out the seven nations that were occupying the land as it states, "You shall not allow any person to live (Deut. 20; 16)." These nations were involved in every form of idolatry. Why were they commanded to kill everyone? The Rambam comments on this verse in the Moreh Nevuchim (Part 1, Chapter 36), "The object of this commandment, as is distinctly stated, is to extirpate that false opinion, in order that other men should not be corrupted by it any more; in the words of the Torah 'that they teach you not' (Deut. 20; 18)." They did not have to physically harm anyone to deserve annihilation. The Torah is telling us if a person does not have correct ideas about G-d, he has no right to exist. He is not living in line with his purpose of existence, which is to gain true knowledge of his Creator. He does not use his mind, which is the essence of Man, to live his life. He lives purely according to his instinctual emotions. Not only has he forfeited his right to exist, he will undoubtedly corrupt others thereby causing them to forfeit their existence.

Today, we are surrounded with a variety of idolatrous ideas. Christianity, which is undoubtedly idolatry, is the most prevalent. It is based on the distorted notion that G-d can be physical, as well as the notion that we need to pray to intermediaries. The Rambam mentions this last notion, in the Moreh Nevuchim (Part 1, Chapter 36), as the foundation of idolatry, "Idolatry is founded on the idea that a particular form represents the agent between G-d and His creatures." Throughout the Torah we only see people praying directly to G-d, never to an intermediary. Eventually the intermediary becomes a god itself as the Rambam shows in the Mishneh Torah (Hil. Avodah Zara 1; 1). Hindus, Native Indians and many African tribes today have fallen to this level. They believe that certain physical objects have the power to do good and evil. Unfortunately, some of their

practices have infiltrated Judaism. Many Jews walk around with objects they feel will protect them from evil. There are those that go to the graves of ancestors and pray to them so that they will take their prayers to G-d. These customs have no source in the Torah. Of course, there are many legitimate customs in Judaism which are not mentioned in the Torah. How, then, are we supposed to know which practices are idolatrous and which are not? The Torah provides the solution. It says in Deut. 18; 9, "When you come to the land that Hashem, your G-d, gives you, you shall not learn to act according to the abominations of those nations." Rashi explains, "But you should learn to understand and to teach. In other words, to understand their actions, how corrupt they are, and to teach your children: Don't do this and that because it is the statute of the idolaters." We are obligated to learn what their practices are, understand that they are false and teach our children not to follow them. When we learn how Native Indians or African tribes wore certain clothes or charms to ward off evil spirits, and the Torah did not endorse it, we must teach our children not to do it. When we see Christians praying to icons and saints, we must tell our children it is wrong. These are not methods that bring a person close to G-d. On the contrary, they further a person from Him. The more a person involves himself in false practices, the more he removes himself from the Ultimate Source of Truth.

The Torah explicitly tells us there is only one method of reaching G-d, "See, I have placed before you today the life and the good, the death and the evil, that which I command you today, to love Hashem, your G-d, to walk in his ways, to observe His commandments, His statutes, and His judgments; then you will live But if your heart will stray and you will not listen I tell you today that you will surely be lost (Deut. 30; 15-18)." The Torah lifestyle, of knowledge, truth and good character, is the only way a person can reach G-d. Any other lifestyle will cause a person to become lost. □

False Views on Conversion

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

Reader: I am a convert to Judaism, completely "ka halacha" following lengthy study with an Orthodox rabbi. One of my friends has told me that my conversion would not be recognized in a certain community. Can this be true? Please explain. Thank you very much.

Mesora: You should not be dismayed by what any sect recognizes. If your conversion was performed by an orthodox rabbi, you are Jewish.

End of story. It is unfortunate, but many people today feel they are being MORE

religious if they support stricter, unfounded ideas. In fact, they are distorting the Torah, not upholding it. I hope I can be of assistance in providing answers to any of your questions, and give you a warm welcome on making the decision to convert.

You should feel comforted that many of our prayers and many Jewish texts are the writings of King David and King Solomon, both descendants of Ruth, who converted. Joshua, who commanded after Moses, also married a convert.

Hashem never cared for a person's history. What is of import to Him is the current level of the individual. Hashem didn't create 'eligions. Man did. God stated "ba-asher hu sham", "I judge as one is now". One's history is of no concern to God. May you set an example for others as a true lover of God. Now, as a Jew.

Reader: Thank you for your thoughtful, and prompt, response.

I am fortunate, indeed, that I have always felt fully accepted as a member of the Jewish people, from the time I first determined to "convert." Actually, even over x years ago when I made my first serious steps, I never felt that I was "converting" in the sense of changing my deepest convictions. Rather, I felt that I had been able to discover my elemental spiritual and religious sense, and my community. Finding home, perhaps.

Over the passage of time, and with the knowledge that I was (baruch Hashem) to become a mother, I knew that I must take all steps necessary to comply strictly with Halacha. I felt the overwhelming responsibility to my unborn child that there be no question whatsoever of his Jewish bona fides. So it was then, x years ago, that I came to understand more clearly the need to insure for my family and myself adherence to Halacha and a Torah way of life. I say that, I hope, with humility, because I know deeply that teshuvah is a process.

So I very much appreciated your warm words and comforting response. Still, since I believe that I do have a "yiddishe kop" I also read between the lines of your response. It was a gentile friend who suggested to me that some sects, at least, might not recognize my Jewishness. It is not that I have any doubt in my heart or my mind of myself, but rather that I am interested to know exactly on what basis some Jews might have that belief. I would like to have the understanding of the position, even if it is not one with which you (or I) agree. In general, to your knowledge, would such a person recognize my son as a Jew? Your further counsel would be most meaningful. Thank you in advance for your time and attention.

Mesora: It should be of no consequence whether another person recognizes your status, or that of your son. Any talmud chocham would definitely recognize both yourself and your son as Jews. If they don't, it is their mistake. I do not see any reason why one would hold a view which God doesn't hold Himself.

Reader: Thank you from the bottom of my heart. Your answer made me laugh out loud, with joy. □