

Christians who abandon that idolatrous life to become Noahides deserve the greatest praise: they tolerate the rejection of former friends and family, and act with the intellectual independence God commands. We admire you all.



1997
2009
12
YEARS

JewishTimes

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

Volume VIII, No. 28...July 3, 2009

WWW.MESORA.ORG/JEWISHTIMES

Download and Print Free

IN THIS ISSUE

PARSHA: CHUKAT	I-5
NOAHIDE JOURNEY	I,10
IDOL NAMES	I,II
CHRISTIANITY'S ROOTS	6-9
BILAM & THE DONKEY	12,13

THE JEWISHTIMES

EDUCATING 10,000S
WORLDWIDE



JOIN IN THE MITZVAH
WWW.MESORA.ORG/DONATE

CANDLE LIGHTING 7/3

Boston	8:06	Moscow	9:00
Chicago	8:11	New York	8:13
Cleveland	8:46	Paris	9:39
Detroit	8:54	Philadelphia	8:14
Houston	8:08	Phoenix	7:24
Jerusalem	7:30	Pittsburgh	8:35
Johannesburg	5:10	Seattle	8:52
Los Angeles	7:49	Sydney	4:42
London	9:01	Tokyo	6:42
Miami	7:58	Toronto	8:44
Montreal	8:28	Washington DC	8:19

Weekly Parsha

Chukat

RABBI BERNIE FOX

The Characterization of Parah Adumah as a Chok

This is the law of the Torah that Hashem commanded saying: Speak to Bnai Yisrael and they should take for you a completely red cow that has no blemish and has never borne

(continued on next page)

Noahides

Noahide Journey

Our 20-year search for knowledge, truth, community, and the true service of Hashem

Kal Taylor

When I was approximately 7 years old, I remember asking my parents, "If Jesus was a Jew, why aren't we learning more about Judaism? How did Christianity come out of Judaism – the words don't even sound the same? What was the original language?" I had a driving curiosity to get to the source of everything and my curious mind was filled with lots of questions.

The answers I received for most of the questions I asked all through my early teen years were:

"You're too young to know or feel that."

"We're not meant to go there."

"Because I said so."

The frustration I experienced in not having any logical answers to my questions led me to go into mental isolation. As a result, I filled the void with incorrect perceptions about people, the world and myself. I made decisions based on my

(continued on page 10)

Noahides

Idol Names

Doug Taylor

The verse in question is Exodus 23:13, which reads (in part), "Do not pronounce the name of another deity. You must not let it be heard through your mouth." (The Living Torah, translated by Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan, Maznaim Publishing Corporation)

(continued on page 11)



(Chukat cont. from pg. 1)

Weekly Parsha

JewishTimes

Weekly Journal on Jewish Thought



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

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

Contacts:

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

Advertising:

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

Donations:

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

Content at Mesora.org:**JewishTimes Archives:**

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

Philosophy Archives:

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

Weekly Parsha Archives:

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

Audio Archives:

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

Interactive, Live, Audible Sessions:

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

Database Search:

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

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

a yoke. (BeMidbar 19:2)

This pasuk introduces the laws of the Parah Adumah – the red heifer. This animal is slaughtered and completely burned. The ashes of the heifer, with other ingredients, are required for the purification. Severe forms of tumah – spiritual defilement – are treated with these ashes.

The passage describes the mitzvah of Parah Adumah as a law. There are various Hebrew words for "law". The term used in our pasuk is chok. Rashi comments on the selection of this specific term. He explains that the term chok means decree. In other words, the mitzvah of Parah Adumah is a decree from Hashem. It is an expression of His divine will. It must be carefully obeyed and respected. Rashi further explains that the use of this term seems to presuppose that the law of Parah Adumah is subject to some criticism. The word chok is the response to this reproach. Essentially, the response is that regardless of the questions evoked by this mitzvah it must be regarded as a decree of Hashem and observed in all its details. What is the criticism evoked by the mitzvah of Parah Adumah? Rashi is somewhat vague in his response to this issue. He explains that the heathen nations can criticize the mitzvah. They will question its reason and design.[1]

These comments are difficult to understand. Many mitzvot are enigmatic. A casual review of the mitzvot of the Torah will result in endless questions. Certainly, the heathen nations will find many elements of the Torah that seem completely unintelligible! The Torah's response to these reproaches is that a person must study Torah as one would any field of knowledge. One cannot expect to appreciate the wisdom of the Torah through a superficial review of the mitzvot. Why does the commandment of Parah Adumah require a special response? According to Rashi, in this case the Torah responds, "This is a chok! Observe the mitzvah regardless of your criticisms and scruples!"

Nachmanides responds to this question. He explains that we must begin by more clearly understanding the reason the Torah uses the term chok. This term is not used simply because the mitzvah of Parah Adumah is difficult to understand. As explained above, many mitzvot seem to defy human understanding. The reason the term chok is used in this case is because the mitzvah of

Parah Adumah seems to contradict a basic tenet of the Torah. One of the fundamental themes of the Torah is that we must abstain from heathen practices and forms of worship. We are forbidden to worship any power other than Hashem. We may not serve demons, spirits, forces of nature, or even angels. In order to regulate our worship and assure that our service to Hashem is free of any heathen influence, the institution of the Bait HaMikdash was created. All sacrifices are to be offered in the Temple where the services are carefully regulated. Generally, we are not permitted to sacrifice outside of the Temple.

However, Parah Adumah is remarkably similar to heathen worship. A cow is burned in an open field. The service is performed outside of the Bait HaMikdash. It can easily be misinterpreted as a sacrifice to the heathen deities. The heathens can cynically argue that we are hypocrites: we decry heathen worship and practices, and then legislate a service reminiscent of the very practices we condemn!

This is the criticism to which the Torah responds. The mitzvah is a chok. It is an expression of the Divine will. It may seem inconsistent with the Torah's strong disavowal of heathen practices. But the law is Hashem's decree. We know that Hashem cannot be inconsistent![2]

**Bnai Yisrael's Response to the Death of Miryam**

And the entire congregation of Bnai Yisrael came to the wilderness of Tzin in the first month. And the nation dwelled in Kadesh. And Miryam died there and she was buried there. And there was no water for the congregation. And they gathered before Moshe and Ahron. (BeMidbar 20:1-2)

The Chumash explains that Miryam died. Immediately thereafter, Bnai Yisrael found themselves without water. This implies a connection between the death of Miryam and the exhaustion of the water supply. Rashi discusses this relationship. Our Sages explain that the forty years Bnai Yisrael traveled in the wilderness Hashem provided water. This miracle was performed in response to the merit of Miryam.

(continued on next page)

Therefore, with Miryam's passing, the miracle of the water ended.[3] Don Yitzchak Abravanel explains that our Sages did not intend to indicate that a well followed Bnai Yisrael in the wilderness. Instead, their message is that Bnai Yisrael miraculously found water in each encampment. The people were traveling in an arid and desolate land. Yet, incredibly they always found water.[4]

Klee Yakar offers an alternative explanation of the relationship between Miryam's death and the exhaustion of the water supply. He acknowledges the comments of the Sages that the water supply was a result of Miryam's merit. However, he does not conclude that her death should have resulted in the discontinuation of this wonder. He explains that the suspension of this miracle was caused by Bnai Yisrael's reaction to the loss. The Chumash explains that Miryam died and was buried. There is no mention of mourning. The implication is that the nation did not mourn Miryam adequately. She was not fully appreciated. Her loss was not recognized as a calamity. Hashem wished to demonstrate the righteousness of Miryam. He discontinued the miracle that her merit had made possible.[5]

Klee Yakar's comments raise an important question. Why was Miryam not appreciated? Ahron and Moshe were mourned. Their deaths were seen as tragedies. Why did the people not have a similar response to the loss of Miryam?

Moshe and Ahron were providers. They had delivered the nation from bondage. They had cared for the people during their sojourn in the wilderness. Bnai Yisrael recognized their dependence on these two giants. Miryam was not a visible leader. She lived a life of righteousness. But she did not conduct her affairs in a public forum. The nation did not recognize a dependency upon Miryam. Therefore, her death was not immediately recognized as a tragedy.

The nation erred in its assessment of Miryam's significance. A nation is the sum of its individual members. Each member contributes to the spiritual whole of the nation. Miryam was an individual of tremendous spiritual perfection. With the loss of Miryam, the spiritual level of the nation was diminished. Bnai Yisrael failed to recognize the importance of the quiet, private tzadik. Loss of the water supply drew their attention to this error.



The Importance of Carefully Formulated Prayer

And the Canaanite king of Arad who dwelt in the south heard that Yisrael was coming by the way of Atarim. And he fought with Yisrael and he captured captives. (BeMidbar 21:1)

Bnai Yisrael were traveling in the wilderness to the land of Israel. The people were attacked by the King of Arad. Rashi comments that these "Canaanites" were really the people of Amalake. Amalake had previously battled Bnai Yisrael. In that conflict, the prayers of Moshe and the people had a fundamental role in Amalake's defeat. On this occasion, Amalake sought to protect itself from these prayers. The king of Amalake commanded his people to speak the language of the Canaanites. He hoped that Bnai Yisrael would believe that they were under attack from Canaanites. Bnai Yisrael would pray for delivery from this Canaanite adversary. The prayers would be improperly describe the attackers. These pleas would not be answered.

Bnai Yisrael encountered the enemy. They were confused. The attackers were speaking the language of the Canaanites. However, their clothing indicated they were the people of Amalake. The decision was made to formulate the prayers in a general format. The people asked Hashem for salvation from the enemy. They did not specify the identity of the adversary. These prayers were answered and Bnai Yisrael were victorious.[6]

Hashem is omniscient. He knew the true identity of the attackers. Bnai Yisrael might pray for delivery from the Canaanites, but Hashem would know the identity of the actual adversary.

Yet, Rashi implies that had the people mistakenly pleaded for rescue from the Canaanites, their prayers would have been useless.

The implications of Rashi's comments are very critical for properly understanding tefilah – prayer. It is commonly believed that the essential component of the process of prayer is the sincerity of the petitioner. It is assumed that if one prays with good intention and earnestness, the requirement of tefilah has been fulfilled. Rashi's comments indicate that this is not true. There is no question that the prayers of a nation confronted with war are sincere. Recognition of mortal danger assures earnestness. Rashi tells us that nonetheless an inaccurate prayer would not have been answered. Sincerity without accuracy is inadequate. Only when these two elements are combined is the tefilah acceptable.

Maimonides explains that this idea guided our Sages in the formulation of the prayers. Our Sages realized that every person could not be expected to design the tefilah in an accurate and appropriate manner. Therefore, they designed the prayers for us. Through combining this legacy from our Sages with sincerity we can fulfill the obligation of tefilah.[7]

Moshe's Attempt to Avoid War with Sichon

And Israel sent messengers to Sichon the king of the Amorite saying: Let me pass through your land. We will not deviate into fields or vineyards. We will not drink water from the wells. We will go on the road selected by the King until we pass through your boundary. (BeMidbar 21:21-22)

Bnai Yisrael approach the land of Sichon. In order to reach the Jordan, they must first pass through the land of Sichon and his people. Bnai Yisrael send messengers to Sichon and ask for permission to pass through his land in peace. Sichon rejects this request and launches an attack against Bnai Yisrael. Bnai Yisrael defeat Sichon, destroy his nation, and capture the entire territory of his nation. This land is subsequently incorporated into the portions of land awarded to the shevatim – the tribes – of Reuven, Gad, and half of Menashe.

It is noteworthy that Bnai Yisrael first attempted to pass through Sichon's territory in peace. The war that ensued was a consequence of Sichon's rejection of Bnai Yisrael's request. In other words, this war was not initiated by Bnai Yisrael. It was initiated by Sichon.

(continued on next page)

In his comments on these passages, Rashi points out that Bnai Yisrael were not specifically commanded by Hashem to offer peace. Nonetheless, Moshe felt that this offer was appropriate.[8] In these comments, Rashi does not explain Moshe's reason for seeking to avoid war. However, Moshe reviews this incident in Sefer Devarim. There, Rashi does offer further explanation. He explains that although Moshe was not specifically required to ask Sichon for permission to pass through his land in peace, Moshe deduced that such an offer would be appropriate. How did Moshe come to this conclusion?

Rashi's comments can only be appreciated, if we consider their context in Sefer Devarim. Moshe explains that Hashem told him that He would deliver Sichon and his nation into the hands of Bnai Yisrael. He commanded Moshe to wage war with Sichon. Moshe sent messengers to Sichon. Sichon rejected the offer presented by these messengers. Moshe attributes Sichon's rejection of the offer to Hashem's providence. Hashem hardened Sichon's heart – as He did to Paroh. Hashem repeated to Moshe that He will deliver Sichon and his land into the hands of Bani Yisrael. Moshe ends his account by reviewing Bnai Yisrael's remarkable conquest of Sichon and his land.[9]

These passages present a number of problems. Nachmanides summarizes these problems. Let us consider two of the issues he raises. First, Hashem told Moshe that he was to wage war against Sichon. The sequence of events suggested by the passages indicates that after receiving this command, Moshe asked Sichon for permission to pass through his land. How could Moshe offer peace to Sichon if Hashem had already commanded Bnai Yisrael to wage war? Second, Moshe acknowledges that Hashem hardened Sichon's heart. Sichon did not really have the ability to make a choice. Hashem deprived him of his free-will. If Sichon did not have free will, what was the objective in offering peace?

Based on these questions, Nachmanides suggests that the passages are not intended to relate the events in their actual sequence. The actual sequence was that, first, Moshe attempted to pass through the land in peace. Sichon rejected this offer. Moshe realized that Sichon had rejected this offer because Hashem had deprived him of the free will to make a reasonable choice. Then, Hashem commanded Moshe to wage war with Sichon and assured Moshe of Bnai Yisrael's victory.

This approach resolves the issues raised by Nachmanides. At the point that Moshe sent

messengers to Sichon, he had not yet been commanded to wage war. He received this command after Sichon rejected the peace offer. Also, Moshe was convinced by Sichon's reaction to his peaceful offer that he had been deprived of his free will. But when he made the offer, Moshe assumed that there was a reasonable chance that it would be accepted.[10]

We can now return to Rashi's comments. Of course, Rashi must respond to the same problems in the passages identified by Nachmandies. However, his response is very different from Nachmandies'. Rashi begins with the assumption that the passages accurately relate the sequence of events. Hashem told Moshe to wage war with Sichon. Nonetheless, Moshe first attempted to secure a peaceful resolution.

Rashi comments are an elaboration of his remarks on our parasha. He begins by acknowledging that Moshe was not commanded by Hashem to propose to Sichon a peaceful resolution. He explains that, nonetheless, Moshe concluded that the appropriate course of action – from the perspective of the Torah – was to make such an offer. Next, Rashi offers two possible explanations of Moshe's reasoning.

The first explanation is based upon an interesting comment of the Sages. The Sages explain that before Hashem offered the Torah to Bnai Yisrael, He offered it to other nations. The Sages add that Hashem knew that His offer would be rejected. Nonetheless, He made the offer. Moshe recognized that Hashem had commanded him to wage war against Sichon and it was a foregone conclusion that Sichon would not accept an offer of peace. Nonetheless, using Hashem's own behavior as a model, Moshe concluded that he should offer Sichon the option of peace. In other words, Hashem had foreknowledge of the other nations' reaction to the offer to receive the Torah. Nonetheless, He made the offer. Moshe also knew that Sichon would reject his offer of peace. Nonetheless, he made the offer.

The second explanation of Moshe's behavior is based on a simple observation. Hashem could have instantaneously destroyed Egypt and redeemed Bnai Yisrael. But instead, He sent Moshe to Paroh. He instructed Moshe to tell Paroh to release Bnai Yisrael from bondage. The plagues that Hashem brought upon Egypt were a result of Paroh's refusal to release Bnai Yisrael. Moshe recognized that it would be possible to destroy Sichon without warning. But he recognized that Hashem had provided Paroh with a warning. Moshe concluded that Sichon should also be provided with a warning.[11]

It is interesting that Rashi proposes two possible explanations of Moshe's reasoning. Superficially, these two explanations seem to be very similar. But a more careful analysis suggests that these two explanations are actually very different from one another.

Rashi's first explanation focuses on the issue of foreknowledge. Hashem has perfect foreknowledge of our behaviors and decisions. Nonetheless, He provides us with options. Moshe concluded that we are obligated to emulate Hashem. Moshe also had perfect foreknowledge of Sichon's response to his offer of peace. He knew it would be rejected. Nonetheless, he emulated Hashem and offered Sichon the option

(continued on next page)

A FREE COMMUNITY SERVICE BOARD stretching throughout THE USA, CANADA & ISRAEL



**OUJOB
BOARD**
Changing Your Life – Forever!

FREE!

- to post jobs/resumes • to browse jobs
- to browse resumes (if qualified)
- education classes & re-tooling events
- resume review-rewrite classes
- Job Fairs/ inventor of the first "virtual" Job Fair
- webinars, seminars, workshops
- ...and more!

Please visit
www.oujobs.org
and see what we are all about



The OU JOB BOARD - Changing Your Life-Forever

of peace. In other words, Moshe concluded that we must act justly towards other individuals. Our concept of the other individual's likely—or definite—response does not excuse us from this obligation. Our responsibility is to act with justice. We cannot ignore this obligation because we assume—or even know—that our behavior will be ignored or not appreciated.

Rashi's second explanation does not make reference to the issue of foreknowledge. Instead, Rashi asserts that we are not permitted to take action against an individual without first providing notice and warning. This notice and warning provides an explanation and rationale for our subsequent actions. In other words, without this warning and notice it would not be possible for the observer to appreciate the rationale for attacking Sichon or for destroying Egypt. The result would be that Hashem and Bnai Yisrael would appear to be the aggressors. Moshe recognized that we must always present the Torah in the most positive light. Sometimes, the Torah requires that we act with aggression, and even cause violence to, another individual. But we must recognize that we cannot embark upon such a path without considering the perceptions that will be generated

by our actions. So, we must provide an adequate warning and notice.

Both of these explanations are valid and both inform our relationships with others and the way we must behave. We must treat others fairly. This is difficult when we suspect or realize that our efforts will not be appreciated. Everyone has been confronted with the challenge of acting with kindness or evenhandedness towards an individual that we suspect or know will not appreciate or even acknowledge our efforts. But the message Rashi is communicating is that we must put aside our disappointment and frustration and act appropriately.

Rashi is also telling us that we must always portray the Torah in a positive light. We must recognize the manner in which our actions will be perceived. Doing the right thing is not enough if our behavior will be judged as unreasonably aggressive or hostile. We must provide an adequate explanation for behaviors that others may perceive as unkind or aggressive. Of course, we cannot control whether the observer will take notice of our explanation or accept it. But we are expected to provide a rationale. ■

[1] Rabbaynu Shlomo ben Yitzchak (Rashi), Commentary on Sefer BeMidbar 19:2.

[2] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Nachman (Ramban / Nachmanides), Commentary on Sefer BeMidbar 19:2.

[3] Rabbaynu Shlomo ben Yitzchak (Rashi), Commentary on Sefer BeMidbar 20:2.

[4] Don Yitzchak Abravanel, Commentary on Sefer BeMidbar 20:1.

[5] Rabbaynu Shlomo Ephraim Lontshitz, Commentary Klee Yakar on Sefer BeMidbar 20:2.

[6] Rabbaynu Shlomo ben Yitzchak (Rashi), Commentary on Sefer BeMidbar 21:1.

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

[8] Rabbaynu Shlomo ben Yitzchak (Rashi), Commentary on Sefer BeMidbar 21:22.

[9] Sefer Devarim 2:24-36.

[10] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Nachman (Ramban / Nachmanides), Commentary on Sefer BeMidbar 2:24.

[11] Rabbaynu Shlomo ben Yitzchak (Rashi), Commentary on Sefer Devarim 2:26.

Need home improvements but not high costs?

We understand. HomeTech provides affordable, quality home improvements.

Tile work (ceramic, marble, vinyl) bathrooms, backsplashes, foyers

Painting & Staining - interior rooms, wood, cabinets, texture painting

Minor Plumbing - faucets, sinks, toilets, new shower heads

Minor Electrical - new light fixtures, ceiling fans, new switches, light timers, dimmers

Drywall Repairs - holes repaired, spackled, and painted.



Shelving - for closets, bedrooms, laundry rooms, playrooms

Molding - door trim, window trim, base/cove molding, chair rail molding

Recaulking - tubs, showers, windows, doors

Regrouting of tubs, showers, and all tile

New door knobs, door locks, cabinet hardware, food disposal units (under kitchen sinks), dishwasher hookup,

Powerwashing of decks, vinyl siding, patios, cement walkways, brick pavers, algae-mildew

Serving the Tri-State Area

HomeTech (845)893-8423
Handyman Services
 All your handyman needs!

NO JOB TOO SMALL
 REASONABLE RATES
 COURTEOUS AND CLEAN
 ALWAYS ON TIME &
 ON BUDGET!



Christianity:

Nurtured by Idolatry's Foul Soil

by, Joshua Plank

Nearly 2000 years ago, a new religion was formed, a religion that would come to dominate much of western civilization. I speak, of course, of Christianity. However, it was not truly new.

Christians view their religion as a kind of continuation of Judaism, and a fulfillment of the biblical prophecies concerning the Jewish messiah. As such, they recognize the Hebrew Tanach as scripture, calling it their "Old Testament". At the same time, however, they reject the fundamental ideas of Judaism, and believe that Christianity has now replaced the older religion. In the words of Ignatius, one of the earliest Church Fathers:

It is absurd to profess Christ Jesus, and to Judaize. For Christianity did not embrace Judaism, but Judaism Christianity ... It is absurd to speak of Jesus Christ with the tongue, and to cherish in the mind a Judaism which has now come to an end. For where there is Christianity there cannot be Judaism.[1]

If Christianity did not spring forth naturally from Judaism, then from whence did it come? Perhaps we can find a clue in the writings of the 2nd century Christian apologist, Justin Martyr. He composed a fictional debate between himself and a Jew named Trypho. Trypho responds like this:

The Scripture has not, 'Behold, the virgin shall conceive, and bear a



son,' but, 'Behold, the young woman shall conceive, and bear a son,'[2] and so on, as you quoted. But the whole prophecy refers to Hezekiah, and it is proved that it was fulfilled in him, according to the terms of this prophecy. Moreover, in the fables of those who are called Greeks, it is written that Perseus was begotten of Danae, who was a virgin; he who was called among them Zeus having descended on her in the form of a golden shower. And you ought to feel ashamed when you make assertions similar to theirs, and rather [should] say that this Jesus was born man of men.[3]

Trypho makes an interesting point: not only is the virgin birth not prophesied by Isaiah, but the entire concept of the virgin birth is completely foreign to Judaism. The God of Israel, who has no parts and does not change, could not possibly impregnate a woman with Himself. The idea seems more at home in Greek mythology. Justin Martyr answers:

I am established in the knowledge of and faith in the Scriptures by those counterfeits which he who is called the devil is said to have performed among the Greeks; just as some were wrought by the Magi in Egypt, and others by the false prophets in Elijah's days. For when they tell that Bacchus, son of

Jupiter, was begotten by [Jupiter's] intercourse with Semele, and that he was the discoverer of the vine; and when they relate, that being torn in pieces, and having died, he rose again, and ascended to heaven; and when they introduce wine into his mysteries, do I not perceive that [the devil] has imitated the prophecy announced by the patriarch Jacob, and recorded by Moses? And when they tell that Hercules was strong, and traveled over all the world, and was begotten by Jove of Alcmena, and ascended to heaven when he died, do I not perceive that the Scripture which speaks of Christ, 'strong as a giant to run his race,'[4] has been in like manner imitated? And when he [the devil] brings forward Aesculapius as the raiser of the dead and healer of all diseases, may I not say that in this matter likewise he has imitated the prophecies about Christ?[5]

Instead of denying the charge, Justin Martyr actually points out more similarities between Christianity and pagan religion. He addresses the pagans in another of his works:

And when we say also that the Word, who is the first-birth of God, was produced without sexual union, and that He, Jesus Christ, our Teacher, was crucified and died, and rose again, and ascended into heaven, we propound nothing different from what you believe regarding those whom you esteem sons of Jupiter.[6]

and again he says:

For having heard it proclaimed through the prophets that the Christ was to come, and that the ungodly among men were to be punished by fire, they [the wicked demons] put forward many to be called sons of Jupiter, under the impression that they would be able to produce in men the idea that the things which

(continued on next page)

were said with regard to Christ were mere marvelous tales, like the things which were said by the poets.[7]

Justin Martyr's defense is that the "devil" did it. We will thoroughly examine this defense at the proper time, but first, let's examine some of the similarities between paganism and Christianity.

Justin Martyr already mentioned Bacchus, the son of a god and an earth woman, "being torn in pieces, and having died, he rose again, and ascended to heaven." [8] Bacchus was also said to be the same as the Egyptian Osiris. [9] In the 5th century BCE, the Greek historian Herodotus wrote of the passion of Osiris: "On this lake they perform by night the show of his sufferings, and this the Egyptians call Mysteries. Of these things I know more fully in detail how they take place, but I shall leave this unspoken." [10]

As can be seen, these beliefs had evolved into elaborate mystery religions with secret knowledge and rites known only to the initiates. Jesus tells his disciples, "it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven." [11] Clement of Alexandria, an early Church Father, addresses unbelievers:

O truly sacred mysteries! O stainless light! My way is lighted with torches, and I survey the heavens and God; I become holy whilst I am initiated. The Lord is the hierophant, and seals while illuminating him who is initiated, and presents to the Father him who believes, to be kept safe for ever. Such are the reveries of my mysteries. If it is thy wish, be thou also initiated; and thou shall join the choir along with angels around the unbegotten and indestructible and the only true God, the Word of God, raising the hymn with us. [12]

Lucian, writing in the 2nd century, describes the mysteries of Adonis, who was said to have been killed by a boar,

I saw too at Byblos a large temple, sacred to the Byblian Aphrodite.

This is the scene of the secret rites of Adonis. I mastered these. They assert that the legend about Adonis and the wild boar is true, and that the facts occurred in their country, and in memory of this calamity they beat their breasts and wail every year, and perform their secret ritual amid signs of mourning through the whole countryside. When they have finished their mourning and wailing, they sacrifice in the first place to Adonis, as to one who has departed this life. After this they allege that he is alive again, and exhibit his effigy to the sky... Some of the inhabitants of Byblos maintain that the Egyptian Osiris is buried in their town, and that the public mourning and secret rites are performed in memory not of Adonis, but of Osiris. [13]

The mysteries of Adonis were so similar to those of Osiris that even the Byblians seemed confused as to the identity of their god. Their stories come in slightly different versions, but the gods of the pagan mysteries are essentially the same, whether they be called Bacchus, Dionysus, Attis, Adonis, Osiris, Tammuz, or Jesus. The idolaters imagined that by joining in the gods' death and mourning, they would gain their favor, and join in their resurrection and immortality.

We read about Tammuz in the Babylonian Epic of Gilgamesh. Gilgamesh says to Ishtar, "Your maidenhood's consort, Tammuz, each year you make him the cause of wailing." [14] The prophet Ezekiel, writing at the height of the "Jews for Tammuz" movement, tells us, "He brought me to the entrance of the gate of the Temple of Hashem that is to the north, and behold, there women were sitting, weeping for Tammuz." [15]

Where did these gods come from, and why are they so similar?

Their origins reach far back into the idolatrous history of mankind. They are gods of vegetation and agriculture, mourned yearly as the death of the plants. They die violently, like the grain which is cut down, threshed, and ground in the mill.

Like crushed grapes, they shed their blood. Jesus says in John 12:23-24, "The hour is come, that the Son of man should be glorified. Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it abides alone: but if it dies, it brings forth much fruit."

This brings us to the central rite of Christianity, one held in common with the pagans. This is the eating of the god. Jesus says, "Whoever eats my flesh, and drinks my blood, has eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is food indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. He that eats my flesh, and drinks my blood, dwells in me, and I in him." [16]

This is a very old practice, which can be found all over the world in one form or another. People foolishly believe that by eating certain animals, other people, or even gods, they can mystically take on admired characteristics such as courage or immortality. Acosta, a 16th century Spanish missionary, wondered at one such example. He records that the natives of Mexico would make an idol of their god out of seeds, corn, and honey. After worshiping it, they divided it into pieces which were distributed and eaten in the manner of the Christian communion. [17] Justin Martyr, after describing the Christian Eucharist, complains:

Which the wicked devils have imitated in the mysteries of Mithras, commanding the same thing to be done. For, that bread and a cup of water are placed with certain incantations in the mystic rites of one who is being initiated, you either know or can learn. [18]

It is often asserted that the Christian baptism derives from the Jewish mikvah. However, it was more likely borrowed from the pagans. The Church Father Tertullian writes:

For washing is the channel through which they are initiated into some sacred rites - of some notorious Isis or Mithras. The gods themselves likewise they honor by washings. Moreover, by carrying

(continued on next page)

water around, and sprinkling it, they everywhere expiate country-seats, houses, temples, and whole cities: at all events, at the Apollinarian and Eleusinian games they are baptized; and they presume that the effect of their doing that is their regeneration and the remission of the penalties due to their perjuries.[19]

Tertullian records several other similar practices in addition to baptism:

By the devil, of course, to whom pertain those wiles which pervert the truth, and who, by the mystic rites of his idols, vies even with the essential portions of the sacraments of God. He, too, baptizes some - that is, his own believers and faithful followers; he promises the putting away of sins by a laver; and if my memory still serves me, Mithra there, sets his marks on the foreheads of his soldiers; celebrates also the oblation of bread, and introduces an image of a resurrection, and before a sword wreathes a crown. What also must we say to his limiting his chief priest to a single marriage? He, too, has his virgins; he, too, has his proficients in continence.[20]

The Christians also take their holy days from the pagans. Christmas, said to be the birthday of Jesus, falls on December 25th or the winter solstice.[21] On the winter solstice the sun declines to it's southernmost point and is born again, beginning it's travels northward. This day was long celebrated as the birthday of the sun. The Church Father Augustine explains that Christians keep this festival "not, like those who are without faith, on account of the sun, but because of Him who made the sun." [22]

Christians also worship their god on Sunday, the traditional day of sun worship. Jesus says, "I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night comes, when no man can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world." [23] Early Christians called him "the Sun of Justice", "the Sun of Righteousness", "the True Sun", and so on. [24] In an above quotation, Justin Martyr cites Psalm 19 where the sun is said to be "strong as a giant to run his race." He so identifies Jesus with the sun that he interprets this passage as a messianic prophecy.

Jesus is said to have been slain on Good Friday and resurrected on Easter Sunday. The very word Easter is the name of a goddess, Eostre. [25] The date of Easter is determined by the spring equinox. The 4th century Christian, Ambrosiaster records an interesting dispute between Christians and pagans regarding this festival:

Yet in order that the devil, who is Satan, might apply some authority to his trickery and color his lies with counterfeit truth, in the first month [March] during which he knew that the Lord's sacraments were to be sacrificed, he established, because his power is very great, mysteries for the pagans to celebrate, so that he might keep their souls in error for two reasons: first, so that his trickery might appear

to be the truth, because his trickery preceded the truth, on the grounds that it would be prejudicial to truth since it was an older practice; and secondly because in the first month in which the Romans have the equinox they keep the same observation as we do, so that they declare that an expiation is made by blood in exactly the same way as we do by the cross. By this cunning he imprisons the pagans in error, so that they think that our truth appears more of an imitation than the truth, as though it had been invented in a spirit of rivalry by way of some superstition. 'For,' they say, 'what was invented at a later date cannot be judged to be true.' [26]

Let us now examine this dispute between Christianity and paganism. Both agree that one must be the original and the other a copy. The number of similarities is too great for either party to flatly deny any connection.

The argument of the pagans goes something like this: The original exists before the copy. Paganism existed before Christianity. Therefore, paganism is the original and Christianity is the copy.

The argument of the Christians is harder to express in logical terms. It seems that they begin with the pre-drawn conclusion that Christianity is the original and paganism is the copy. Then they come up with a rather outlandish theory to explain how that could possibly be. This is the sort of argument that appeals only to their fellow believers.

One might argue that the Christians do not claim that demons magically copied Christianity before it existed. Instead, they claim that demons heard the prophesies of the Jews, and created counterfeit christs in an effort to beat God to the punch, so to speak. So here we find further evidence that the argument of the Christians is false. Let's look at an example:

In the quotation of Trypho the Jew cited above, he explains how Isaiah 7:14 is misquoted and taken out of context by the Christians. In fact, it's not even a prophesy of the messiah. Read on to verse 16, "when the child does not yet know to reject bad and choose good, the land whose two kings you dread, shall be abandoned." This child, Immanuel, was born more than 700 years before the supposed birth of Jesus. A being wise and powerful enough to copy Christianity before it existed, would surely be capable of investigating the meaning of words and examining the simple context of a verse. This shows that these "devils" do not exist in reality, but only in the imagination of the Christian, who projects upon them his own faulty views.

Furthermore, they are so steeped in pagan thought that their very defense against the accusation that they copied paganism, is itself a copy of paganism. This whole idea of a devil and demons which oppose the forces of good comes from Gnostic dualism. Gnostics generally believe that the material world was created by an evil demiurge. They rely on the divine messenger who descends into this world to provide them with salvation. The New Testament refers to the devil as "the god of this world". [27] This is

(continued on next page)

(cont. from page 8)

Noahides

in clear opposition to God's words: "Understand today and reflect on it in your heart, Hashem is the God in the heavens above, and on the earth below, there is no other." [28]

Examine the above verse. Moses does not tell the Jews to simply "believe" or "have faith". He tells them to use their intellects, to know, to reflect, to prove. This is the path of truth.

This article has addressed many subjects in order to demonstrate that Christianity is not based on truth but falsehood. Christianity attempts to attach itself to the proven history of the Jews, hoping in vain to gain some validity, but the roots of the Jesus mythos are firmly grounded in the foul soil of idolatry. I encourage the Christian reader to search these matters out for yourself. Do not be swayed by your emotions or the reactions of others. Reason. Press bravely ahead, overcoming all obstacles in your noble quest for truth. Then you will know the words of the prophet as few do:

Hashem, my strength and my stronghold and my refuge in the day of distress. Unto You nations will come from the ends of the earth and say: 'Our fathers have inherited only falsehood, futility that has no purpose.' [29] ■

[1] Ignatius, Epistle to the Magnesians, Chapter 10

[2] Isaiah 7:14

[3] Justin Martyr, Dialogue with Trypho, Chapter 67

[4] Psalm 19:6, or 19:5 in Christian bibles

[5] Justin Martyr, Dialogue with Trypho, Chapter 69

[6] Justin Martyr, First Apology, Chapter 21

[7] Justin Martyr, First Apology, Chapter 54

[8] Justin Martyr, Dialogue with Trypho, Chapter 69

[9] Plutarch, On Isis and Osiris, 35, see also Herodotus, The Histories, Book 2, 42

[10] Herodotus, The Histories, Book 2, 171

[11] Matthew 13:11

[12] Clement of Alexandria, Exhortation to the Heathen, Chapter 12

[13] Lucian, The Syrian Goddess, 6-7

[14] The Epic of Gilgamesh, Tablet 6

[15] Ezekiel 8:14

[16] John 6:54-56

[17] José de Acosta, The Natural and Moral History of the Indies, Book 5, Chapter 24

[18] Justin Martyr, First Apology, Chapter 66

[19] Tertullian, On Baptism, Chapter 5

[20] Tertullian, The Prescription Against Heretics, Chapter 40

[21] that the winter solstice fell on Dec. 25 see Pliny the Elder, The Natural History, Book 18, Chapter 59

[22] Augustine, Sermon 190

[23] John 9:4-5

[24] for example see Cyprian, Treatise 4, On the Lord's Prayer, 35

[25] Bede, The Reckoning of Time, Chapter 15

[26] Questions on the Old and New Testament, 84 (this work, once attributed to Augustine, is now thought to be written by an anonymous author referred to as Pseudo-Augustine or Ambrosiaster)

[27] 2 Corinthians 4:4

[28] Deuteronomy 4:39

[29] Jeremiah 16:19

JewishTimes

The Weekly Journal on Jewish Thought

**It's better to give
and to receive!**

Give: Email a FREE subscription of the JewishTimes to a friend or relative and they'll also receive 2 free gifts at right: our 60 pg book Retrospective and the 32 pg Passover Special edition with astonishing imagery.

Receive: As you help grow our readership, more advertisers place ads. We pass that on to you in the form of your continued, free JewishTimes subscription. Plus, we'll give you these 2 publications! *Invite others today!*

www.Mesora.org/Subscriptions



iPhoneDevelopers

800,000,000
downloaded apps

37,000,000
iPhone/iPod users

...which explains why
numerous industry leaders
have developed iPhone
apps, and why you should.

Contact us today.
A few million customers
want to meet you.



www.iPhoneDevelopers.info

emotions. My life and motivations were centered around gaining independence, power through manipulation, and survival. This experience anchored in me the teachings that man was not meant to live in isolation.

Using these motivations, my life was a disaster and by the time I was in my mid twenties, I had an epiphany that I was on a slow suicidal path. I felt my life energy dying. I realized I had 3 choices: I could continue on the destructive path to my slow suicide, I could end it all quickly by committing suicide, or I could change.

The most positive choice for me was to change. I did not know how or where to begin the search, so I focused on specific areas in my life that weren't working. I figured that education was the key and I went back to the university and finished my business degree, leaving myself open to opportunities that represented change.

About ten years later, I met my husband, who was preparing to participate in an archaeological dig in Israel. The six weeks he was gone were transformational for him and, when he returned from Israel, he was clear about his focus to study the Torah and find rabbinical teachers.

His commitment was attractive to me, because it represented a strength and clarity I hadn't known, yet it was also scary. As scary as it was, I followed his lead, kicking and screaming most of the way.

During that time, one of our teachers, Rabbi Morton Moskowitz, visited us in our home. When he was leaving, he turned to me, looked me straight in the eyes, and said, "I can prove to you that the Torah life is the best life there is." I was immediately attracted to the challenge and replied, "You're on, Rabbi, and be prepared for lots of questions." That was the true beginning of my Torah and mussar study with Rabbi Moskowitz and many other rabbinic teachers in the Seattle, New York and New Jersey Orthodox Jewish communities.

Another key change for me came in the form of our two sons, Daniel and Aaron. They were born 16 months apart in the early years of my Torah learning. Since there didn't seem to be many people like us around, at least not in our area, we became pioneers trying to establish a sense of tradition, meaning and community. We home-schooled our sons and accessed the home-school resources of the local school district's alternative education program, sharing resources and classes with approximately 420 other students. Though the predominate religion represented there is Christian, the center celebrated diversity in religion, ethnic participation and home-schooling philosophies.

Because of the rich history of the Jews, we used the holidays as opportunities to learn about their story, to gain appreciation of their struggles and to learn from their relationship with Hashem. For Hanukkah, we made placemats for the table and invited friends and family to share in our observance and play the dreidel game. For Succot, we made a succah out of canvas and pvc pipe, and we painted the canvas walls with scenes from the Jewish nation's history. Several Purim celebrations were spent dressing in costumes and joining the activities and reading of the Megillah at the local synagogue. Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur were the most confusing and difficult for us to mentor Daniel and Aaron through because of our own inaccurate programming from Christianity about guilt, shame and repentance.

We established family reading times each night where we would cover the weekly Parashat from the Torah and read selected Jewish children's books. Daniel and Aaron's mussar education came from analyzing the characters and actions from the Torah as well as the stories from books such as, "The Other Side of the Story, Giving people the benefit of the doubt", by Yehudis Samet, and the "Our Heroes", "Kids Speak", and "People Speak" series by Chaim Walder and The Ehrenhaus Middos series by Rabbi Baruch Chait.

When each one of our sons reached the age of 13, we held a special birthday for them. We communicated to them that this is the age when we would begin recognizing them as young adults and that we would gradually



shift our parenting style from authoritarian to mentor. They would be responsible for the consequences of their actions and we would function as their advisors and provide them the support they needed to succeed. Our home would be seen as the modeling environment for the homes they would eventually create with roommates and their own future families.

When Daniel and Aaron inquired about their own search for a mate and the lack of a Noahide community to draw from, we counseled that the community was not as important as finding a woman who was open to entertaining ideas, character refinement and possessing intellectual honesty about determining what's true.

By the time they were nearing high school age, they had emerged as informal leaders – recognized for their clear thinking and wisdom. Daniel and Aaron commented that their friends called them the "Jews" for that reason. Being different was now cool. Our home became the center for entertaining ideas. We expanded our dining room table to accommodate the number of teens that joined us on Friday and sometimes Saturday evenings for a celebratory meal and rich conversation.

How would you feel if your life was way above anything you could ever imagine for yourself? That is my life today. Every morning when I awake and say the "Modah Ani", I feel like my life is like the icing on the cake.

In one of the first shiurim I attended in our early years as a Noahide, Rabbi Weiss, from the New York community, spoke on the subject of Aaron's death and how it was like a "kiss". That idea has played on my mind and serves as a key motivator for my actions today. In analyzing the idea and by asking questions about the terms such as, what is meant by a "kiss" and how could a kiss be related to death, I was led to the conclusion that Aaron must have elevated his thoughts and actions to such a high level that he had already extricated himself from the physical world. Now, at the time of his death, there was no attachment to the material and, therefore, the transition from this life to a spiritual existence was very easy and pleasant, like a kiss.

Another approach I later learned from this verse is that the deterioration of our physical bodies is actually a blessing. Focusing on the body roots us into the physical world. Through the gifts of reflection and acceptance, we gain the perspective and wisdom that comes from experience. Once again we have choice – we can age gracefully through acceptance and wisdom or we can resist the natural aging process and experience death by being torn away from the physical world.

I use this idea to help me align my thoughts with reality. I often think about my life backwards from the time of my death and what will be most important. If I am struggling with something in the material world, once I am able to identify it as "just stuff", it is easier for me to let the frustration go.

Several years ago, I had the privilege of speaking at the recognition celebration of Rabbi and Rebbetzin Moskowitz's 25 years of service to the local Jewish community. During that speech, I acknowledged to them that several years prior to that time, I had recognized that Rabbi Moskowitz truly had proven to me that the Torah life is the best life there is. Rabbi and Rebbetzin Moskowitz had not only provided dedicated years of service to the Jewish community, but they have provided a Kiddush Hashem (sanctifying G_d's name) in serving as an Or LeGoyim (light to the nations) in opening their Torah, their home and their community to the stranger - a struggling Noahide family. ■

On that verse, Rashi indicates that you shouldn't use an idol as a landmark – as in, "wait for me besides such-and-such idol" ? or reference it similarly as a time landmark ? as in, "the day of such-and-such idol". He also gives an alternative interpretation that the verse is to teach that idolatry is as important as all of the other commandments combined. Interestingly, he doesn't clarify whether the verse means that it is prohibited to even speak the idol's name. (Rashi's Commentary on the Torah, translated by Rabbi Yisrael Isser Zvi Herczeg, Mesorah Publications, Ltd.)

Nachmanides takes a somewhat different approach. He gets very specific and says that one shouldn't even mention the name of their gods such as ? and he goes on to mention four of them by name. Then he says that one should refer to them in a manner of condemnation, such as "the abhorrent thing of Moab", and "the abomination of the children of Ammon". He then adds that it's possible that the meaning of "make no mention" means not to mention the name of other gods to their worshippers (my italics added). (Ramban Commentary on the Torah, translated by Rabbi Dr. Charles B. Chavel, Shilo Publishing House)

Sforno takes the position that one shouldn't even mention the idol's name. (Sforno Commentary on the Torah, Translated by Rabbi Raphael Pelcovitz, Mesorah Publications, Ltd.)

Maimonides offers us an interesting paradox. In his Laws of Idol Worship And Its Regulations (see www.panix.com/~jjbaker/MadaAkum.html; thanks to Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim for this URL), the last sentence of Chapter 5, Section 10 reads, "Even to make mention of the name of an idol not by way of an oath is forbidden, for it is written, '...and make no mention of the name of other gods'." However, note that in Chapter 5, Section 11, he states, "Any idol mentioned in Scripture, such as Pe'or, Ba'al, Nebo, Gad, et cetera, may be mentioned by name." Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim also pointed out to me that the Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh Dayah 147:4 and Maimonides' Laws of Star Worship 5:10 appear to make it prohibited to mention the idol's name for any purpose.

Just to make it even more interesting, Jack Saunders noted that, in the Rambam's Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Mecachim, Chapter 11:4, he writes Jesus of Nazareth in Hebrew.

So let's summarize some of the questions here.

- (1) How do we reconcile what appear to be conflicting statements by the Rambam?
- (2) Can we, or can we not, say the name of Jesus?
- (3) Does any of this devolve upon Noahides anyway, at least halachically?
- (4) What about saying names today that once were idols, but aren't considered so any more, such as January or Apollo?

The statements of the Rambam combined with the fact that he wrote the name Jesus suggest that one of two things must be true. Either the Rambam was only talking about oral statements (so that writing the name of Jesus wouldn't be a violation), or he concluded that "Jesus" is not an idol.

According to Rabbi Chait, door #2 is the correct one. Rabbi Chait indicated that you can say the name of Jesus because he's a human being, not a god. He pointed out that the difference between Jesus and (prohibited) idolatrous names is that a stone is a true idol. However, Jesus' name was Jesus at first. The people then later decided to make him a god, and called him by his name. Stone idols, by contrast, were idolatrous in their inceptional form, so their names were always related to

their definition as an idol. But Jesus was a man first ? and the name was used that way ? and only later did some people make that name into a god.

This clears up our question around the Rambam. He can write the name Jesus because of the reason given above. At the same time, he can hold that idol names shouldn't be used. That also tells us that we can say or write the name Jesus. So that covers questions (1) above, and it also covers question (2), regardless of the answer to question (3).

Regarding question (3), Rabbi Chait said that Exodus 23:13 does not apply to Noahides, but swearing in the name of a god does apply as this is recognition of the god. So that takes care of question (3).

But what about names like January or Apollo? We already know that we don't have a halachic prohibition here because of the answer to (3) immediately above. Further, Rabbi Chait pointed out that only names that signify exclusively a currently worshipped god are prohibited (which also ties back to why "Jesus" is permitted, since it is not exclusive but is also used as a person's name). Now when I say January, I am not referring to an idol. In fact, until this topic came up in this news group, I had no idea that January had idolatrous roots. Ditto for many other similar names. When I say January, I'm referring to the month. When I say Apollo 13, I'm referring to the moon shot, or the movie of the same name. When I say Taurus, I'm referring to a Ford automobile. From a practical standpoint, it's impossible for me to know the origin of every word in our language, and I have to be able to operate in society. Thus, even if Noahides were halachically prohibited in this regard ? which they're not ? it is ok for me to use those names since I'm using them to refer to something in the practical world, not an idol.

It's important to note that there is nothing magically taboo about an idol name. It would be easy to go down the road of thinking that something cosmically bad happens when an idol name is used. Yet idols, by definition, are nothing. Thus, saying their name can't be doing anything cosmically in any way, except that it potentially gives credence to the idea that they mean something other than nothing. Thus, we can see a reason (not necessarily all reasons) why the Torah would tell the Jewish people not to even utter them. The Torah doesn't want the Jewish people to give any credence to anything that is not real. And idols are certainly not real.

Thanks to Rabbi Chait, Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim, and all who contributed to this. ■





Bilam and the Donkey

Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim

The story of Bilam and his donkey contains many unbelievable events and is described in great detail. As the account in Numbers 22:21 goes, Balak was the king of Moav at that time and was faced with the fear of millions of Jews damaging his land by gaining safe passage. To avert this problem, Balak called upon Bilam, a prophet, and requested that Bilam curse the Jews so that Balak would have ease in attacking them and in driving them out. When Balak sent the first group of messengers to Bilam, Bilam's reply was that he had to consult with God. God's answer was that Bilam should not curse the Jews for they are blessed. Bilam informed the messengers that he was refrained from going by God's word. Balak persisted and sent more messengers: now, higher in rank. Bilam responded by saying that even if his house was filled with silver and gold he couldn't go. Nonetheless Bilam requested an answer from God. This time God gave him permission, however, he still must refrain from cursing the Jews.

What happens next is quite remarkable. Bilam arose early and God was angry that he went. This was after God gave him permission! God placed an angel in the path to deter him as he was riding on his donkey. It states that the donkey saw the angel standing in the path with an outstretched sword in his hand, and that the donkey turned aside and went into the field. Bilam hit the donkey to get it back on the path. The angel stood a second time in the vineyard, a fence on both sides of the donkey and Bilam. The donkey saw the angel and pressed up against the wall in avoidance, crushing Bilam's leg. Bilam continued to smite the donkey. The angel passed to a place that was narrow with no room to pass left or right. The donkey saw the angel and crouched down under Bilam and Bilam's anger burned, smiting the donkey – this time, with a stick. God opened the mouth of the donkey and it said to Bilam, "What have I done that you have smitten me these three times?" Bilam responded, "Because you have mocked me. If there were a sword in my hand I would kill you." The donkey said, "Am I not the donkey that you have ridden upon from long before until today? Is it my nature to act this way?" Bilam replied, "No".

God then opened Bilam's eyes and he saw the angel of God standing in the path with a sword outstretched in his hand. Bilam then prostrated himself before the angel. The angel said to Bilam, "For what have you smitten your donkey these three times? Behold I have come out to turn you away because your way is contrary to me. Your donkey has seen me and turned aside these three times. Would it be that you would turn aside. Because now I would kill you and cause her (the donkey) to live." Bilam says, "I have sinned. I didn't know that you stood in the path to turn me aside. And now if this is bad in your eyes, I will return." The angel informs Bilam that he may continue, but only that which he tells him may he say. Rashi states that the significance of "three" times represents two things: the three forefathers, and the three Jewish festivals. Ibn Ezra states that once the donkey spoke it died, and that with each successive hitting, Bilam used a stronger object.

Following are some of the many obvious questions on this section, including the meaning behind both Rashi's and Ibn Ezra's statements:

- 1) Why didn't Bilam see the angel of God at first?
- 2) What's the significance of the sword?
- 3) Why, according to the Ibn Ezra, did Bilam hit the donkey with a stronger object each time?
- 4) Why did the donkey die after it spoke?
- 5) What was the argument of the donkey?
- 6) Why wasn't Bilam astounded at the ability of an animal to talk?
- 7) What does the fence allude to, and why did the path become more and more impossible to traverse with each appearance of the angel?
- 8) Why is it important that Bilam's leg was crushed?

(continued on next page)

There is a very important statement of Maimonides regarding this and similar events. He states in the Guide for the Perplexed that in every case in Scripture where we find an angel appearing or talking, the entire account is describing a vision, and not an actual physical event. The event didn't take place in physical reality, but in a person's mind. This being the case, this entire story must be interpreted in this light, according to Maimonides. The is a parable for a conflict with which Bilam was struggling.

If we refer back to the immediate events leading up to Bilam's riding on the donkey, we see that Bilam comes off appearing as a true follower of God. But with a closer look, his real nature is seen. He was asked to curse the Jews. God told him he could not. The fact that Bilam (during the account of the second messengers) requests from God again to know whether he can curse the Jews, shows that he wanted to curse them. That's why he said, "God has refrained me from cursing." Meaning that he really desired to curse, but God prevented him.

This desire to curse the Jews awoke in Bilam a strong conflict. On the one hand he desired the destruction of the Jewish people. On the other hand, he knew that God blessed them. Bilam was well aware that God's establishment of His providence over the Jews was due to our forefather's perfection. Abraham's self-realization of the absurdity of idolatry, his conclusion of the reality of monotheism and the Oneness of God secured this treaty of God's providence. With this knowledge, Bilam was greatly troubled as to which path to follow, namely 1) his desire for the destruction of the Jews, or 2) the word of God. This entire account is a parable of his conflict.

Interpreting the elements of this story as representing psychological phenomena, the story's real meaning can be explained...

Bilam, in great conflict, decides to travel to Balak with the cursing of the Jews as his goal. In order to do so, he must suppress his knowledge of God's command to refrain from cursing them. Riding on his donkey represents the suppression of what his conscience (the donkey) "sees". "Riding" conveys a sense of dominion over another object. Bilam himself (in this vision) represents his evil instincts and thus, isn't aware of reality (the angel of God). One's instincts aren't designed with the ability to judge what is morally good or bad. Instincts are not perceivers, but rather, they simply emote us. (The same is true about any apparatus in the human body. The heart isn't designed to breath, and the lungs aren't designed to pump blood.) This explains why Bilam couldn't "see" the angel. Bilam, in this story, represents his instincts – a faculty of the mind unable to 'perceive'. Instincts have only one function: they guide a person towards instinctual satisfaction. The angel represents reality. Bilam's inability to curse the Jews was so threatening, it was represented by an angel of God wielding a

sword. A very terrifying sight. The conscience, represented by the donkey, is designed to perceive reality. This is its main function. (This is why Adam and Eve were granted the conscience after they sinned too easily. They needed an additional means for restraining their instincts.)

Now that we understand the main components of the parable, (what Bilam, his donkey, and the angel represent: respectively; the instinctual drive, the conscience, and God's reality) we must interpret this account accordingly.

Bilam is riding on his donkey – "his evil instincts are riding (suppressing) his conscience." His conscience alone is aware of the reality – "the donkey sees the angel", but Bilam doesn't. Whenever the conscience goes "off of the path", it starts to become more conscious, making Bilam sense his error, so Bilam "hits" his conscience to suppress it – "hitting the donkey". His conscience slows him down – "crushes his leg" – as he tries to go on his "path". Bilam's weapon for suppressing his conscience becomes stronger – "he hits the donkey with a stick". Then the conscience finally prevails and 'speaks' – "the donkey talks". The argument of the donkey is that "it's not me who's at fault" – meaning that Bilam gains insight (from his "talking conscience") into his actions and realizes that there's something behind his suppression of his conscience. At this point, Bilam becomes aware of his denial only through God's kindness. That's why God had to open his eyes. The donkey dying after it spoke means that once his conscience made him aware of this information, the conscience ceases to function – termed here as death. It did its job. It "dies".

Rashi's statement that the three things shown to Bilam's donkey alludes to the three forefathers and the three festivals fits in beautifully: the donkey – Bilam's conscience – was contemplating the whole reason for God's direct providence over the Jews, namely the perfection of our forefathers – that which entitled the Jewish nation to God's providence. Bilam's conflict was directly caused by these three individuals (Abraham, Isaac and Jacob). Had it not been for them, he might have been able to curse the Jews. That's why the donkey turned aside when it thought about the forefathers. Abraham, Isaac and Jacob brought about the relationship with God, and now, Bilam desired to curse them! But all curses are from God. We also see why Bilam acted calmly towards a talking animal, as Maimonides states, this was all a vision.

In summary, the entire account of Bilam and his donkey – according to Maimonides – was a vision or conflict, happening only in his mind. In order for the Torah to inform us of this, the Torah writes it in a parable format so that many ideas and psychological principles can be capsulated into one account. A parable also conceals ideas from those who would shrug at them, if written openly. The fact that Bilam did travel to Balak in physical reality is not discounted by this explanation. ■

WATCH YOUR BUSINESS or PLAYBACK RECORDINGS ANYTIME... FROM VIRTUALLY ANYWHERE!

Super Sharp

H.264
Compression
Technology

**Hi-Def &
Low Prices !!**

Special Offer

10% OFF

**Regular Pricing
With This Flyer**

Custom Designed Systems For All Business Types

- DELL PC-DVR w/ Intel Dual Core & H.264 Hi-Def Video Technology for Surveillance, Recording & Remote Access
- 19" High Resolution Flat Panel Monitor
- Point & Click to Watch In Single or Split-Screen Views
- Real-Time Live View at 30 Frames Per Second Per Camera
- Record Up To 30 Frames Per Second Per Camera
- Up to 3 Terabytes of Hard Drive for Recordings
- CD-RW and USB for Saving and Back Up
- Available in 4, 8, 16, 24 and 32 Channels
- Audio Ready on Each Channel
- Remote View Software & Internet Browser Capability
- Choice of High Resolution Color Cameras:
PTZ, Bullet, Dome, Box, Infrared, ID and License Plate Cams
- Spot Monitors and POS / Register Interfaces Available
- Technical Support w/ Remote Virtual Assist
- One Year Warranty Includes Parts and Labor

Superior Quality - User Friendly - Affordable

FIRST ALLIANCE
Protection Systems



**Need a Complete System?
Upgrade? DVR? Cameras?**

Call Today For a FREE Consultation

(800)258-8028

www.faps.com

☆ Present this flyer, and we will donate 10% of your system purchase or lease value to Mesora ☆