

**If we cannot prove something to others, we have not proved it to ourselves.  
Believing anything that has not been proved – certainly regarding religion –  
violates God's will in His gifting reason to mankind.**

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Boston	8:00	Moscow	8:46
Chicago	8:05	New York	8:07
Cleveland	8:40	Paris	9:30
Detroit	8:48	Philadelphia	8:09
Houston	8:05	Phoenix	7:20
Jerusalem	7:27	Pittsburgh	8:30
Johannesburg	5:16	Seattle	8:44
Los Angeles	7:46	Sydney	4:50
London	8:51	Tokyo	6:38
Miami	7:56	Toronto	8:37
Montreal	8:20	Washington DC	8:14

## Weekly Parsha

# Massay

RABBI BERNIE FOX

## The Torah's Review of Bnai Yisrael's Travels in the Wilderness

*These are the journeys of Bnai Yisrael that went out from Egypt in their groups through Moshe and Ahron. (BeMidbar 33:1)*

*(continued on next page)*

## Morality

# FAME

RABBI STEVEN PRUZANSKY

The Sages of the Talmud understood the value of entertainment, best exemplified by this passage in Masechet Taanit 22a: "Elijah the Prophet pointed out to Rav Beroka two people whom he characterized as worthy of the world-to-come. Asked by Rav Beroka what their special merit was, they answered, "Anshei badochay anan," we are comedians, jesters. When people are sad, we cheer them up." Sometimes, distractions are important – comedians can even merit the world-to-come – but only as long as they are perceived as distractions.

The celebrity world took a big hit in the last few weeks – major stars have died: Michael Jackson, Farrah Fawcett, Ed McMahon, Karl Malden, and my own favorite, Billy Mays, the product hawker. All death is sad, but some of these deaths – one in particular – evoked almost a national grief that hasn't yet ended, as if these were people of real accomplish-

*(continued on page 7)*

## Reason

# Must Religion be Rational?

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(Massay cont. from pg. 1)

## Weekly Parsha

# JewishTimes

Weekly Journal on Jewish Thought



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The final parasha of Sefer BeMidbar reviews the travels of Bnai Yisrael in the Wilderness. The commentaries are concerned with the inclusion of this material in the Torah. The Torah is written very concisely. The recounting of the journeys in the Wilderness seems superfluous.

Rashi explains that these journeys are recounted in order to communicate a key aspect of the Wilderness experience. Hashem had decreed that the nation should spend forty years wandering in the Wilderness. Hashem did not constantly move Bnai Yisrael from one location to the next. The nation only traveled forty-two times during the forty years.[1]

This is a fitting conclusion for Sefer BeMidbar. The sefer recounts the changing of the relationship between Hashem and His nation. This change was brought about by the nation's refusal to enter the Land of Israel. Hashem decreed that Bnai Yisrael should wander in the Wilderness for forty years. According to Rashi, these passages capture the nature of this decree and Hashem's mercy even when punishing the nation.

Maimonides offers an alternative explanation for the description of the various journeys. He explains that the Wilderness experience involved a great miracle. The nation was sustained for forty years in a land of complete desolation. Hashem provided Bnai Yisrael with water, food and all other needs. The generation that experienced these wanderings could recognize the miracle of survival. However, future generations would not have the benefit of experiencing the forty years of wandering. These future generations might not appreciate the extent of this miracle. They might assume that the nation traveled near populated areas. They might believe that the path taken by Bnai Yisrael avoided arid areas. The Torah provides a detailed description of the journey. All of the stations at which the nation camped are enumerated. This route does not pass through populated areas. The path described in the parasha leads through an arid, desolate wilderness. With this information the reader can appreciate the miracles required for Bnai Yisrael's survival during these forty years.[2]

**The Boundaries of the Land of Israel**

*Command Bnai Yisrael and say to them: When you come to the land of Canaan, this is the land within the borders of the land of Canaan that shall be your hereditary territory. (BeMidbar 34:2)*

Hashem describes to Moshe the borders of the

Land of Israel. This land will be divided into portions and distributed among the tribes. Rashi explains that these boundaries are very important in halachah. Various mitzvot only apply in the land of Israel. Therefore, any territory outside of the borders is exempt from these commandments.[3]

This description of the boundaries indicates that the eastern border is the Jordan River. This is difficult to explain. The tribes of Reuven, Gad, and half of the tribe of Menashe settled in the territory conquered from Sichon and Og. In general, any land conquered by the nation is considered by halachah to be part of the Land of Israel.[4] This land was situated on the eastern side of the Jordan. The proper eastern border should be the eastern boundary of this territory!

Rav Moshe Feinstein Zt"l explains that there is a basic difference between the Land of Israel west of the Jordan and the territory to the east. The land to the west was promised to Avraham and the forefathers. It was destined to be conquered and become the Land of Israel. The land of Sichon and Og was not included in this covenant. It was not predetermined that this land should become part of the Land of Israel.[5]

This distinction can provide a possible answer to our question. Moshe had awarded the land of Sichon and Og to Reuven, Gad, and half of Menashe. However, he had stipulated a condition. This land would become their portion after they had conquered the territory west of the Jordan. Moshe had required that first the land of the covenant must be captured. Then, this additional land could become part of the Land of Israel. The sanctity of the land of Sichon and Og was suspended until the land of the covenant was possessed.

Now, the description of the boundaries can be explained. Hashem specifically described the borders of the land of the covenant. This is the land that must first be sanctified. Once this is accomplished, the land of Sichon and Og can be possessed and sanctified.

**The Role of the Mesorah in Determining the Correct text of TaNaCh**

*And the cities that you should give to the Leveyim – the six cities of refuge that you will give so that the murderer may flee there and in addition to them, forty-two cities. (BeMidbar 35:6)*

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The Torah explains that the Land of Israel was to be divided among the tribes of Israel. Each shevet – tribe – was to receive a portion in the land. However, Shevet Leyve – the tribe of Leyve – was not to receive a typical portion. Instead, each of the other tribes was instructed to designate cities within its portion for the Leveyim to live in. Tribes that received a larger portion would be required to provide a greater number of cities. Tribes that received a smaller portion would apportion a lesser number of cities to the Leveyim. These cities – arey migrash – were to serve as the settlements of the Leveyim.

In addition to these cities, the Leveyim were also assigned the cities of refuge. These cities of refuge are also discussed in our parasha. A person who accidentally takes another's life is exiled to one of these cities of refuge. The portion of the Leveyim also included these cities of refuge. In addition to the arey migrash, the Leveyim lived in these cities.

Our pasuk explains that the Leveyim were to be given forty-two arey migrash and an additional six cities of refuge as their portion in the Land of Israel. Of course, these instructions could only be carried out once the Land of Israel was captured and occupied. Therefore, it would be Yehoshua's – Moshe's successor – responsibility to carry out these instructions.

Sefer Yehoshua outlines the process by which these cities were assigned to Shevet Leyve. The Navi provides a detailed account. It enumerates the number of cities contributed by each tribe, lists the specific cities, and identifies the family within the Shevet Leyve that received each city. As required by the Torah, forty-eight cities were assigned to the Leveyim – forty-two arey migrash and an additional six cities of refuge.

There is an interesting problem in the account in Sefer Yehoshua. In order to fully appreciate this problem, it is helpful to begin with an outline of the account in Sefer Yehoshua. The account is highly structured. The account has two parts. In the first portion of the account, each family within the Shevet Leyve is identified and the tribes within Bnai Yisrael that contributed cities to this family are listed. This portion of the account ends by indicating the total number of cities provided to each family by the tribes. The second portion of the account again identifies each of the families and the tribes that contributed cities for this family. However, in this portion of the account the names of the specific cities contributed by each tribe are listed. Like the prior portion of the account, this portion of the account ends by providing the number of cities contributed to the family.

In the Navi's account of the cities to be given to the family of Merari there is a problem. In the first portion of the account, the Navi explains that twelve cities were assigned to the family of Merari. These cities were contributed by the tribes of Reuven, Gad and Zevulun.[6] In the second portion of the account the Navi provides a detailed enumeration of the cities contributed by each of these tribes. The Navi lists the four cities contributed by Shevet Zevulun and the four from Shevet Gad. The accounting ends by repeating that the family of Merari received a total of twelve cities.[7] The problem with this account is obvious. The Navi only list eight cities – those contributed by Shevet Zevulun and Shevet Gad. Missing are the four cities assigned to Merari from the portion of Shevet Reuven.

Rabbaynu David Kimchi – RaDaK – discusses this problem. He begins by noting the discrepancy. The family of Merari was to receive twelve cities from the tribes of Zevulun, Gad and Reuven. However, the detailed enumeration of these cities only accounts for eight cities. The four to be provided by Shevet Reuven are not listed. RaDaK comments that he has seen alternate versions of Sefer Yehoshua that "correct" this apparent omission in the text. In these versions, a list is provided of the four cities contributed by Shevet Reuven. This list does correspond with a list provided in Divrei HaYamim. RaDaK explains that in his research of carefully copied versions of the text he has never seen this correction. Therefore, he rejects the suggested correction. RaDaK adds that it is apparent from the writings of Rav Hai that he too was aware of the problem in our text but nonetheless insisted that the text is accurate.[8]

There are three difficulties with RaDaK's comments. First, although RaDaK rejects the alternate version of the text, he seems to concede that these alternate version is more reasonable and do solve the problem in the text. Second, RaDaK rejects these alternate versions of the text. However, this leaves a problem. There is an inconsistency in the narrative. The cities contributed by Shevet Reuven are omitted. RaDaK does not make any effort to explain the inconsistency! It seems strange that RaDaK rejects the more reasonable version of the text and accepts the more traditional version without offering any explanation for the clear inconsistency in our version. Finally, RaDaK supports his conclusion by referring to Rav Hai. He notes that Rav Hai was aware of the problem in the text but insisted that nonetheless, the text should not be altered. What is RaDaK adding to his analysis through referring to Rav Hai? RaDaK has already concluded that the more ancient versions of the text that he examined

do not enumerate cities contributed by Shevet Reuven.

In order to understand RaDaK's position, it is important to appreciate the fundamental issue that he faced. RaDaK was confronted with a clear inconsistency in the text of the Navi. On the one hand, alternate versions of the text resolved this issue by adding a verse. These alternate versions are more consistent than our text. From an analytical, scholarly perspective these alternate texts seem to be more reasonable than our text. On the other hand, all of the ancient versions of the text that RaDaK could authenticate were identical to our text and contained the inconsistency. RaDaK was faced with the dilemma of choosing between unauthenticated alternate texts – that make sense – and more a more traditional text – that is clearly problematic.

In other words, the issue can be reduced to a simple question. How do we determine the proper text? Do we establish the text through analytic scholarship or through tradition? RaDaK maintains that the actual text is determined by mesorah – tradition. This is an important conclusion. In determining the text of TaNaCh, we are not permitted to decide issues based on analytic scholarship alone. We can use this method as a guide in choosing between authenticated alternates. But we cannot establish the text on the basis of analytic scholarship alone. Instead, the mesorah establishes the text.

But there is another element to RaDaK's analysis. RaDaK does not attempt to explain the inconsistency in our text. Apparently, he maintains that providing an explanation is not fundamental to his decision to accept the ancient texts. In other words, even if the text suggested by mesorah is obviously problematic it must be accepted. This implies that – in establishing the text of TaNaCh – mesorah is not just more important than analytic scholarship. It actually defines the text. In other words, the key issue is not to determine the actual text created by the author. Halachah requires that the valid text is the one indicated by mesorah.

An illustration will help clarify this point. Let us assume we discovered that the text of Sefer Yehoshua contained in the Dead Sea Scrolls corresponds with the alternate text that RaDaK had seen. The Dead Sea Scrolls predate Rav Hai. Would this discovery suggest that the alternate text should be accepted? Could it not be argued that these ancient documents are more accurate and less subject to errors and omission that may have slipped into the text with the passage of time? The implication from RaDaK's comments is that we

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(Massay cont. from previous page)

would still reject the alternate text! How is this implied? RaDaK seems completely willing to concede that the alternate text is more consistent than our text. In turn, this implies that RaDaK is not primarily concerned with determining the actual original text. Instead, he focuses on the text established through mesorah. Mesorah determines the proper and accepted text. In other words, the accepted text is not necessarily the one that most closely corresponds with the original document. The accepted text is the text indicated by mesorah. We cannot establish a continuous chain of mesorah leading to the Dead Sea Scrolls. Therefore, in regards to determining the mesorah text, these scrolls are irrelevant.

It should also be noted that RaDaK's approach seems to be the only reasonable course to be taken by halachah. How can we ever determine the exact wording of the original text? Let us return to our example of the Dead Sea Scrolls. Our discovery would prove only that the alternate text existed at the time at which these scrolls were created. We cannot know if the text in the Dead Sea Scrolls was the only text in existence at that time. It is possible that our text also existed at that time! Therefore, halachah requires that these issues be resolved on the only basis that is practical. Mesorah defines the proper text.

Now, we can appreciate RaDaK's reference to Rav Hai. RaDaK's point – in making this reference – is that Rav Hai's version of the text was the same as ours. Because RaDaK maintains that mesorah actually establishes the text, this is a relevant observation. Rav Hai was his generation's transmitter of the mesorah. His comments indicate that there is a strong and established mesorah regarding our text. Based on the criteria he has established for determining the proper text, this indication of the mesorah is fundamental to his conclusions. ■

[1] Rabbaynu Shlomo ben Yitzchak (Rashi), Commentary on Sefer BeMidbar 33:1.

[2] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Moreh Nevuchim, volume 3, chapter 50.

[3] Rabbaynu Shlomo ben Yitzchak (Rashi), Commentary on Sefer BeMidbar 34:2

[4] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Mishne Torah, Hilchot Terumot 1:2.

[5] Rav Moshe Feinstein, Derash Moshe, Sefer BeMidbar 32:29.

[6] Sefer Yehoshua 21:7.

[7] Sefer Yehoshua 21:34-38.

[8] Rabbaynu David Kimchi (RaDaK), Commentary on Sefer Yehoshua 21:7.

## Fundamentals

# Moshiach

## ...not from the dead.



RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

### Moshiach

by, Rabbi Reuven Mann

The Rambam, whose position on Moshiach is considered authoritative by the Rebbe, clearly lays out the basic criteria by which the Moshiach will be known. He will bring the entire Jewish people back to a faithful observance of Torah, according to the written and oral laws, will fight, successfully, the wars of G-d, will build the Holy Temple in its place and ingather the exiles of Israel. The Rambam makes it clear that if he fails at any point then, no matter how great a tzadik he may be, he is not the Moshiach.

### Moshiach: Not from the Dead

by, Rabbi Saul Zucker

The burden of proof is not on those who say that moshiach won't come from the dead — the burden of proof is on those who say he can come from the dead. The reason for that is twofold — moshiach, certainly according to the Rambam, whom Chabad accepts as to the halakhos of moshiach, says that the person will reach a level of nevuah and kingship naturally, then will be revealed to be moshiach. "Naturally" means just that — not from among the dead. Now if one wants to claim that "naturally" includes from the among the dead, the burden of proof is on him. Further, if moshiach can come from among the dead, why would it not be the greatest king we ever had or could have — Moshe Rabbeinu — especially because we know for sure that Moshe will be resurrected, as the gemara states "Az yavdil Moshe..." mi-kan letechiyas hameisim min haTorah.", "From here we learn Resurrection is in the Torah".

Rabbi Zucker further discussed Talmud Sanhedrin 98b, describing who is fit as the Messiah. The Talmud suggests two people: depending on whether the Messiah had already died, or if he was yet to come from the living. Rashi explains the Talmud's statement "if Messiah was from the dead it was Daniel". Rashi says if he "was" (hayah) from the dead, teaching that the Messiah "from the dead" does not mean he "will" be resurrected, but that if he had "come already", then it was Daniel. The Talmud does not say Messiah will yet come as a resurrected person. ■

On a Torah, Internet blog, a debate has been ongoing regarding Moshiach (Messiah). One person is intent on spreading his belief in the dead Rebbe as the Messiah. Many others hold this view. The following is his response to someone I know, who is rational, and tried to educate the messianic, but to no avail:

*"You and your Rabbi are of course entitled to your opinion, however I can tell you that personally I do believe in the power of the song of the redemption Na Nach Nachma Nachman MeUman. I believe that the Rebbe King Messiah explained that 770 in Crown Heights is actually the miniature Beit HaMikdash - Holy Temple until the redemption will come soon God willing, and he also said that the Third Beit HaMikdash will actually descend from Heaven in Crown Heights and then fly together with 770 to its place in Jerusalem. Looking forward to hearing more of your interesting thoughts.*

*All the best,*

*Na Nach Nachma Nachman MeUman*

*Long live our master, teacher and Rebbe, King Messiah forever!"*

As foolish and dangerous notions continue to spread, a response is also continually required.

First of all, Messiah is not decided via a human vote. So this approach is flawed from the get-go. I will quote a few Rabbis who have previously addressed this issue quite adequately.

## Letters



# Letters

*from our*

## READERS



### Letters

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

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### Conforming

**Reader:** Can you retell Rabbi Chait's quote about man's conforming to reality, or trying to have reality conform to one's wishes.

**Mesora:** Rabbi Chait taught that a Rasha (evil person) is one who attempts to twist reality (the external world) to conform to his wishes (internal world). Such a person wishes to protect his fantasies, seeking to substantiate them in the real world. He seeks such support, as he in fact senses their fallacy. These desires run and ruin his life, yet they appeal emotionally, like seeking great honor.

Haman, for example, was severely disturbed by Mordechai's lack of recognition for Haman as he walked by. All others bowed to Haman. Haman's honor was threatened by Mordechai's refusal to bow or budge. He therefore attempted to "correct" this threat to his ego in the real world by exterminating Mordechai's nation. This was Haman's "twisting" or reality to substantiate his thirst for ego. As reality didn't conform to his wish, he attempted to blot out that reality.

A Tzaddik (righteous person) works in the opposite manner: he attempts to conform himself to the world he witnesses. He realizes he is nothing, and does not seek honor, but rather, honors the Creator. He is in line with reality, and enjoys the most splendid life, since he does not seek to distort reality, which is frustratingly useless. Changing his internal view to conform with how the world works, he is in harmony, not in conflict. Haman was constantly in conflict, as the world does not revolve around him, but forces mankind to realize a Creator. The Tzaddik is one who recognizes that food is essential, so he farms the land. The Rasha relies on omens, superstitions and false gods, and goes hungry. Had the Rasha conformed to reality and planted grain, he would not starve to death. ■

### Real Jews

**Reader:** Who is a Jew? Is this based on genes or one's philosophy/religious practice? I heard that one who converts must have had some Jew in his or her ancestry or that the convert takes on an additional (Jewish) soul.

**Mesora:** At the end of his 13 Principles, Maimonides says a (born) Jew who abandons

even one of these principles, is "outside the nation, denies truth and is a heretic". Similarly, he teaches that one who does not circumcise himself has no portion in the World to Come. (Laws of Circumcision 3:8)

Also true, the Torah says in numerous places, "One Torah for the convert and the born Jew". That means all mankind is equal.

We learn that a Jew is not defined by genes but by the life he or she leads.

Leaving Egypt, the Jews were commanded in circumcision and in slaughtering the Egyptian deity. One fine explanation: this was because to accept Torah at Sinai, one required instinctual perfection – demonstrated by circumcision – and intellectual perfection – demonstrated by killing Egypt's god and declaring God the only force behind reality.

Maimonides quotes the verses that teach the abhorrence of one uncircumcised, and the praise of one who is circumcised. Jeremiah 9:25, "all nations are uncircumcised". Genesis 17:1, "walk before me and be complete". We understand the praise of being "complete", but wherein lies the ridicule of "all nations are uncircumcised"? That verse merely states a fact. I would suggest the following...

Nations being uncircumcised is a fact. No ridicule exists in these words. But there is one more word in that verse: the word "all". Perhaps the lesson is that if "all" other nations act identically in one area, it is a much different case than if only one or a few acted that way. For what causes all people to act, if these people are bereft of Torah? The answer: natural disposition or "emotions".

Without following the intellectual life prescribed by the Torah, a human being has only one other faculty: instincts. The lesson Jeremiah imparts is that when we see all nations acting a certain way, it must be generated from the instincts as they have no Torah for direction. Thus, the ridicule is that all nations are instinctual.

The notion that "one who converts must have had some Jew in his or her ancestry or that the convert takes on an additional (Jewish) soul" is nonsense. God favored Abraham and Ruth – both gentiles – due to their perfection. And God's very words "walk before me and be complete" mean that Abraham's perfection is based on subscribing to certain truths, and enacting them, as God commands. And Maimonides teaches that one who stumbles in even one of the 13 Principles, is a heretic. Being born Jewish play no role.

God does not say perfection is due to an inherited gene or a super-added Jewish soul. These foolish notions are verbalized by insecure and arrogant "Jews". ■



# Must Religion be Rational?

**RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM**

We engage reason in our daily lives. We read contracts prior to signing them, we calculate our expenditures based on income, we explore maps before traveling to new areas and we take only those medications that have been proven. We understand that all matters of our universe follow reason. Should we then abandon reason in our philosophies or religious lives? Is there any consideration that determines we simply follow belief in these two areas?

Ahhh...but there's that process acting up again...even in our exploration of where and when reason should apply. We cannot escape the process of "questioning and answering"...a "rational" approach. Maimonides teaches one should not accept as true that which is not witnessed, that which is unsubstantiated by reason, or what violates what the Rabbis teach. And our Rabbis never taught that there exists any power, force or "energy outside of what we witness.

In his Laws of Torah Fundamentals (2:2) Maimonides teaches that the means by which we arrive at a love of God is by studying creation alone. Amazingly, here<sup>[1]</sup> he does not mention Torah study. We wonder how studying creation and nature generates a love of God.

Let us first define "nature". What is it? Well, it is difficult to say the word nature, without the word "law". We usually describe the universe as functioning in accord with "natural law". By definition, "nature" refers to a set of laws. But what is a law? Law refers to that which guides non-deviating behaviors. We say it is a law that the Earth rotates, since we witness this behavior in a unchanging state. It is also a law that mass and gravity are related. Water flows, fire burns, and so on. What is constant, is guided by "laws". Maimonides means to say that through our discovery of natural law, we will witness repeating phenomena in many areas. And in all areas, the laws compliment each other creating a universal harmony. It must be planned. This natural order forces us to recognize some Cause or Designer behind the scenes, as it is impossible that any object or law created itself.

Maimonides' lesson is that a love of God – an appreciation for His wisdom – will naturally arise



in each of us when we witness the amazing systems that govern the universe, the human body, plant-life, the animal kingdom microscopic particles, outer space, mathematics and all sciences. "In accordance with the knowledge [we obtain] will be our [level of] love".

God granted us the ability to perceive, comprehend, extrapolate and use reason...all based on what we witness. And that's the key word: witness. For if we do not witness something and merely believe it to be, while nothing offers any evidence, we live in a fantasy and we are not approaching God. The Torah teaches that all our efforts are in fact to be directed towards a Love of God: "And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul and all your might". (The Shema Yisrael prayer) If one chooses to accept that, which is not proven, and merely says "well it COULD be true", then one deviates from reality, and abandons the mitzvah of Loving God. But these people live a contradiction...

If someone tells the "COULD be true" personality "There's a force or energy out there that will provide your rent and food, so you no longer need to work" that person would not quit his/her job and rely on this. You would not risk foreclosure or eviction. That is a reality you wish to avoid over all else. (Emphasis on the word "reality") Similarly, you would not ingest a poison, had someone else told you that "There's a power out there that protects against the poison". Your understanding of reality is how you guide your life in all areas vital to your existence. So why deviate in religion?

Haftoras Vayikra (Isaiah 43) ridicules man for this very dichotomy in his philosophy. The Haftora describes man taking a single tree trunk and with one half, warming himself and cooking his food. With the other half, he bows to it and says "Save me for you are my god". The ridicule is that although in the area of survival (food, warmth) man functions in line with his accurate perception of reality; in his religious life, he abandons reason. The very same object that he can destroy through burning, he also worships! This displays a grave inconsistency and distortion in man's philosophy. It unveils the ability for the religious part of man to completely ignore reality. He can accept contradiction. But God's prophet admonished us for this very behavior. Therefore, to follow reason in our lives, while accepting unproven religious views, falls under the ridicule of the prophet, and God.

Why do people follow views that have no validity? If the view is not seen working in the universe, man can only adhere to such a view if he either imagines it, or hears it from another person. Now, had that person not told them such a view, they would not witness such an idea in the universe, and they would never arrive at such a behavior. One must not follow an opinion – even from a reputable source, teacher, Rabbi or book – if that opinion is not validated as true and observable. For this very reason, the Torah prohibits contact with the dead and ghosts, belief in demons, belief in unproven powers or forces, belief in gods, idols, witchcraft, omens, horoscopes, voodoo, talismans and amulets. Ibn Ezra teaches that we are prohibited from what is false. (Lev. 19:31): "the Torah does not command against truth, only what's false, and the proof is the idols."

I recently asked a person claiming to have contact with the dead, to prove her claim. She said "I don't try to prove it".

If we cannot prove something to others – we cannot prove it to ourselves. It is then merely a belief.

No sane individual works a full year based on the "belief" of payment on day 365.

No one leaps from an airplane with no parachute, relying on the "belief" that an airbag on the ground will cushion their landing.

If we abandon belief and seek proof for decisions governing our physical temporal lives, we must certainly demand proof for ideas that affect our eternal lives, our religious life. ■

<sup>[1]</sup> In his Sefer HaMitzvos, Maimonides does in fact say that love of God is arrived at through His mitzvos and His action.

(continued from page 1)

## Morality



ment who were personally known to the mourners, as opposed to being just entertainers, anshei badochay, entertainers, whom we think we knew but did not at all.

Indeed, these were people who serviced particular needs that we have, and in that sense no different than the plumber or the grocer, who also service our needs. If you doubt that, then ponder this: Michael Jackson is probably the first person in history whose will was filed for probate before his body was placed in the ground. Priorities...! It is apparently more important to find out how much money he had, where he had it and who is to get it than to actually bury him, which to date – two weeks post-demise – has yet to happen. The sycophants who surrounded him used him, as he used them and an “adoring public” that tormented his life – literally made it unlivable. How exploited was he? Well, his funeral required a producer, which could open up a new line of work for people in these troubled economic times (the polar opposite, I suppose, of the “party planner.”)

So what do we know about these – all talented, to be sure – and how are they different

from the butcher or the baker, who are also talented in their own way? One thing: fame.

They are famous, some are famous for being famous – but we think we know them because they have fame. But fame is a drug, and in America it is one of the most addictive drugs. On some level, we all want to be known; no one wants to toil in anonymity for 80 years and then disappear without a trace. But fame has become an end in itself, and not the consequence of any particular set of accomplishments. That is why America suffers occasionally from young men who mass murder perfect strangers – because, as they concede, at least they will die famous, and they lack the ability to achieve fame in a more productive or conventional way.

Thus, it is no surprise that the United States Senate now boasts a real comedian as a member, to join the other 99 comedians who are about as funny as the professional. Nor is it any surprise that Sarah Palin resigned her office; it is perfectly logical – even taking her statements at face value regarding the media torment she endured, her desire to work for her causes, write a book, etc. Celebrities, not people of real accomplishment, win elections today. The White House offers Exhibit #1 of this doctrine. Sarah Palin, if she runs for higher office, would not have even served one full term as governor – but nor did Barack Obama complete even one term – even sponsor one important piece of legislation – in the Senate. But it is unnecessary, and to an extent counter-productive to winning elections, to actually demonstrate any real achievement. She is in a much better position – if higher office is her goal – giving speeches, writing books, hosting talk shows, perhaps even doing modeling or movie cameos than by actually governing Alaska. Politicians are more advantaged by glibly talking about what they would like to do than by actually doing something. Governance is a slog.

This is the celebrity culture run amok, with an obvious and deleterious effect on governance, nurtured by a mass media that is as insipid as it is shallow, and by an electorate that votes based

on the likeability of candidates rather than their policies.

But we are drowning in this celebrity culture, and all of us are affected by it. We all look for attention, even notoriety, as proof of our existence and worth – but in fact it is proof of neither. People are consumed by the mundane activities of “celebrities” who are hounded and harassed by photographers who give them no rest and deprive them and their families of normal lives, all to feed the insatiable appetites of the public, and the egos of the stars (many of whom would find being ignored a worse fate than being harassed). And those who cannot acquire fame themselves often seek to cultivate a false relationship with those who have fame, so they will share in the derivative glory. Hence, the institution of the “fan” – in sports, entertainment, etc. – which begs the question: is life so empty that the distractions are the focal point? For many people, tragically, the answer is “yes.”

The paradox is that fame is often required to accomplish even important things. Unknown people can’t change the world – so how do we avoid falling into that trap? What is the difference between good fame and bad fame?

The answer is apparent from our daily prayers. Every morning we recite verses from Nechemia, including this statement (9:10): “Because of the signs and wonders You (G-d) imposed upon Pharaoh... You brought Yourself renown as clear as day.” G-d became famous as a result of the Exodus from Egypt! So too, if we Jews are worthy, G-d makes us supreme over the nations “for praise, renown and glory” (Devarim 26:19). In both instances, the word shaim, literally, name, or here, fame, renown, is used. What is a shaim?

Rav Shmshon Rafael Hirsch commented that the “name” is the essence of an entity, that which makes him sham, literally “there,” a presence; the “name” is the person’s real identity. Fame that comes naturally as a result of a person’s essence – his knowledge of Torah, his mitzvot, his good deeds, or his moral aspirations – is laudable. It is a reflection of his soul. But fame that comes as a result of a person’s incidental features is often lamentable; in a sense, it detracts from the person’s humanity. He will be perceived as caricature, as a one-dimensional distraction from what really has meaning and importance in life. That one can sing, dance, paint or act – or has twelve toes or two heads – is interesting, a talent, but they do not represent expressions of the soul, and thereby cannot reflect that person’s essence. It is

(continued on next page)



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the inner world that is most meaningful and has the greatest impact on the real life of others.

When the heathen prophet Bil'am looked at the Jewish people and exclaimed – "how goodly are your tents, Yaakov," he saw that the entrances to our private homes were not aligned, so one could not gaze into another's home from one's own. That is, he saw that Jews – ideally – are restrained, private, modest, and not addicted to the allures of fame and glamour. He saw that real fame emerges from what an individual accomplishes in his personal tent – his home – and what his reputation is in Mishkenotecha Yisrael, the holy places of the Jewish people. That is true fame that should be celebrated.

That is what matters. All else is of little significance, all else is caricature, all else is the exterior of the person that doesn't matter much – in the long or short term. Thus, when Micha the Prophet underscored for us, what all mankind wants to know – what is the good, and what does G-d want from us – he answered (6:8): "to do justice and love kindness and to walk humbly with G-d," mindful that our task in life is not to fawn over the ersatz fame of the distractions but to add renown to G-d and sanctify His name, to give our lives meaning rather than to bask in the illusory achievements of others.

Perhaps this should be one goal of the thinking Jew in our world – to publicize the parameters of true fame and the objectives of the fulfilling life – for our betterment and that of all mankind. Because if we don't, then an American society that is increasingly decadent and intellectually flabby will be even less capable of living in the real world – of terrorists, nukes, and evildoers who are uninterested in singers and dancers and those who mortgage their years on earth rejoicing in their fame and mourning their demise. ■

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