



**Reader:** The Midrash says that originally trees were to have the same taste as the fruit, as the Chumash states "eitz pri." However, the trees deviated from G-d's original intent and the tree bark did not have the taste of the fruit, "eitz oseh pri". How is one to understand this midrash? Clearly, trees are not endowed with intelligence nor with the capacity to 'decide' to act in one particular way. The fact that fruit trees are created in a way that the bark does not taste like the fruit, must be the will of G-D. How then is one to understand this Midrash?

**Mesora:** Trees have no consciousness. The Rabbis wrote this Medrash to teach that pursuit of perfection in the physical - of any kind - is impossible. God created the physical in a manner that metal rusts, things wear out, and people age. The purpose? That we become frustrated with our initial, instinctual plan to satisfy temporal, physical desires, and redirect our energies to timeless Torah - where man enjoys true life with no frustration.

ESTD  
1997

# JewishTimes

Dedicated to Scriptural and Rabbinic Verification  
of Jewish Beliefs and Practices

Volume II, No. 1...Oct. 4, 2002

WWW.MESORA.ORG/JEWISHTIMES.PDF

Download and Print Free

## IN THIS ISSUE:

FALSE CHRISTIAN BELIEFS	1, 2
THE SNAKE'S HEAD	1, 3
TORAH IS YOUR LIFE	1, 4
A MECHANISTIC GOD?	2
ADAM'S LONGEVITY & LEARNING	3
WHY ADAM'S FATE IS OURS	4
WHO IS BETTER?	4

## SUGGESTED READINGS:

SEE THESE AND OTHER ARTICLES AT OUR SITE

### Maimonides' 13 PRINCIPLES

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

### God's Existence Belief or Proof?

[www.mesora.org/belieforproof.html](http://www.mesora.org/belieforproof.html)

### God's Land Without God?

AN OPEN LETTER TO THE JEWISH COMMUNITY:  
[www.mesora.org/openletter/openletter2.html](http://www.mesora.org/openletter/openletter2.html)

## False Christian Beliefs: God's Procreation & Faith

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

**Reader:** I discovered your website during the Alan Keyes - MSNBC controversy and have read some of your articles from time to time. I am not Jewish, I am a Roman Catholic. I have sometimes wondered at the opinions expressed here regarding the falsity of Christianity in light of the Bible. I do not expect Rabbi Ben-Chaim to endorse Christianity (!) but it would be nice if he could refute what we actually believe rather than what he thinks we believe.

(continued on page 2)

## The Snake's Head

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

What do we learn from the fact that man conquers the snake by crushing its head, and the snake conquering man by bruising his heel? (Gen. 3:15)

The Sforno teaches that there is a lesson derived from this statement: "Man conquers the snake by crushing its head, and the snake conquers man by bruising his heel". Sforno interprets "head" and "heel" to mean "beginning" and "end" respectively. Using these interpretations, Sforno teaches that man conquers the instincts at their very outset - their beginning. When an instinctual urge arises in man, it is at this point that he has the highest probability of conquering such urges, as man is still in control of all his faculties. But if man allows the urge to take hold of him, and he does not fight it, the urge becomes greater, and man loses all chance of subduing the urge. This is how the psyche operates. Stating that man "crushes the head of the snake" means, according to Sforno, that man conquers the instincts at their "head", at their initial onslaught. The snake "biting man's heel" means that the instincts subdue man at the end, at the "heel" of the battle. Man is overcome at the end of the battle.

It makes sense that the Torah informs man of our psychological workings at the very commencement of this great work, the Five Books of Moses. The Torah is an instruction for our perfection. By definition, it must include an explanation of our definitive components; the mind and the instincts. Here, the Sforno understands the "snake's interaction with woman" to parallel our very psychological design.

(continued on page 3)



## TORAH IS YOUR LIFE

RIVKA OLENICK

"For it is not an empty thing for you, for it is your life, and through this matter shall you prolong your days on the Land to which you cross the Jordan, to possess it." Deuteronomy 32:47

"For it is not an empty thing for you." Your efforts to master and obey the Torah are not empty; for it is your life; midrashically, the Torah is not empty, and if you find it to be unsatisfying, then the failure stems "mechem" - from you: you are lacking, not the Torah."

Nothing in the Torah is devoid of meaning; each and every passage if we delve into it, will yield rewards for us." (Rashi) Rashi's makes a strong statement when he says our efforts to "master and obey" the Torah are not without benefit. He seems to imply that one has to master and obey, not master or obey. Many people obey yet never master. He says that to do this is not "futile" that it is your existence and your purpose in life. If a person really "delves" into the ideas this effort will yield great rewards.

(continued on page 4)

# False Christian Beliefs: God's Procreation & Faith

(continued from page 1) □

Naturally my religion seems far-fetched and pagan when it is not properly understood. Two questions I have: He has written in some of his articles that God could not have a son. He said that bearing offspring is a occurrence in nature only. Yet in Christianity, we interpret the Genesis account of man's special creation "created in the image and likeness of God" to mean more than man's endowment with reason. It also means (partly) that man's nature as a creative and procreative being are also images of God.

1) Is there something about the Divine nature which prevents Divine procreation? (Let us remember that the Christian notion of Divine procreation is not like the Mormon one, in which God has a wife and well...um, you know.)

**Mesora:** Procreation has one definition, that definition is limited to biological organisms. The entire question of God and procreation is as absurd as the question of, "Can gravity procreate?" Something as gravity, and God which are not physical, but metaphysical, and certainly not organisms, cannot procreate.

**Reader:** The Christian doctrine of God begetting a son is rather more subtle. It involves God and his knowledge of himself. God has a self image. And since he is God, this self knowledge is perfect and his self image is perfect; so perfect that this image, in fact, shares entirely the Divine essence and nature and power. Therefore the image is also God. Hence God's "son": a human term to define a supernatural phenomenon. In another of the Rabbi's articles he says that Christians take their religion on blind faith, as if this faith was not based on any logic or historical events. Which is untrue, of course.

**Mesora:** Your statements follow no rational laws or reason. They are here say. It is heresy to propose God as akin to humans in any way. A self image is based on the existence of a human psyche. Anything such as a rock, plant, fish, an animal, and God, do not fall into the class of humans, and therefore have no psyche, and no self image.

Regarding historical events, reason does not deny accurate, historical accounts which your people experienced. It is in fact the opposite. Only that which is provable history is what should be followed. Reason denies that which is not your history, I mean, the fabrications perpetrated by a few conspirators to spread stories such as Jesus performing miracles, walking on water, and healing the blind. Judaism and reality do not deny that the Creator of our reality can alter natural laws. But man cannot. Man is the

created, not the Creator, and by definition, man is governed by laws, and cannot control them. If man cannot prevent his own flesh from burning when in contact with flames, how can he propose to do so for objects outside of himself? We do not ascribe miraculous powers to even the leader of the prophets, Moses. When asked by Pharaoh to halt the plagues, Moses prayed to God to do so. Moses recognized he was a created being, and not the Creator of the laws. Therefore, Moses knew he could not control anything other than what his muscles could move. This is man's limit in his range of function.

**Reader:** 2) Please explain how the Christianity is different from Judaism when it comes to accepting things on faith or on the testimony of the fathers of the religion.

**Mesora:** To continue on the heels of my last thought, I was saying that reality demands there is a Creator Who has exclusive control over all laws. This is why we say that Jesus and all men have no abilities. When do we say that miracles did occur, or that someone was a true prophet of God? Only when we find mass witnesses of an event, an event which the mind can easily grasp. There cannot be a fabrication en masse of a lie. There is no such human motive. If masses attest to an event easily grasped, (not a belief), such as Caesar's rulership of Rome, Alexander's acts of conquering, David's kingship over Israel, then all such history is true. We find no alternate accounts for those periods, but unanimous acceptance. Such stories spread as truths, as it is impossible that a history would be accepted by a people if it was not true. Furthermore, they would not spread a false account of their own history.

In contrast to an 'event', a false 'belief' can spread because it does not have to stand the test of reason, as belief is contrary to reason and proof. Anyone can believe. Belief whether events transpired is not a function of rational analysis, and therefore worthless. It is for this reason that Christianity demands blind faith. Christianity's originators knew very well that to attract followers, they needed to go unopposed. They also desired a semblance of religion and therefore kidnapped Judaism as their sheep's clothing. "Blind faith" became their main tenet - the perfect platform to eliminate rational dispute against their premier - which was amidst Judaism's rational thinkers. You will find that all other religions attempt to mislead others with a fable of an individual who spoke with God. Since such stories do not have

witnesses, you either believe that false prophet or you don't. You have no proof against what he perpetrates, so in some people's hearts, they truly feel he is a prophet.

But Christianity ignores one blaring truth: The mind was given to man. God wished that mankind engage it in all areas, especially in religion, the approach to the Benefactor of this mind. How unappreciative to simply engage blind faith, and ignore our primary gift of reason and intelligence.

Judaism is the only religion based on rational laws, tracing back to a historically proven event of God giving the Torah to Moses and the Jews on Mount Sinai in the year 2448 of our current count of 5763 since Adam and Eve.

This event was witnessed by 2.5 million Jews, and would not have been globally accepted as truth - even by Christians - had it never occurred. Those who deny this event, must also deny all history. Reason demands all history is true - including Sinai - he only time when God revealed Himself to a nation, selecting them as the bearers of His laws for all mankind to follow. Deuteronomy 4:33-34, "Has any nation heard the voice of God speaking from amidst the flames like you heard, and lived? Or has God come miraculously to take a nation from the nations with miracles, signs wonders, and with war and with an outstretched arm and a mighty hand and with a strong arm, and great wonders as all which God your God has performed for you in Egypt in front of your eyes?"

I wonder how other religions have the blind, ignorant audacity to make claims of divine selection, while simultaneously maintaining as true, this text from the Bible. Again we see Christianity's defiance of engaging reason, even though God gave intelligence to all mankind.

**Reader:** 3) If it were true that Christians check their intellects at the church door, what about Alan Keyes, a Roman Catholic. Could a man who scrutinizes everything else in life with insight and clarity neglect to scrutinize something as all important as his religion? "Does this make sense?" Thank you for your time. Sincerely, Jill

**Mesora:** I appreciate your humor. Yes, a brilliant mind may be uncritical in a given area. God gave us many years on earth. In time, hopefully we use our intelligence to reexamine all our decisions, be they scientific, or religious. I cannot speak for Alan Keyes' decision. Obviously I do not agree with other religions based on my preceding arguments. □

## A Mechanistic God? □

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

**Reader:** You say that: "We cannot speak of God's "purpose". Purpose means He has an obligation to fulfill something cast upon Him by another system. This cannot be, as He precede all else. Nothing infringes upon Him."

I agree with this. But you also hold that "all His actions are of necessity". Isn't this - to hold that God's actions are free and also of necessity (not free) - incompatible?

**Mesora:** God being "free" of other influences is fact. It must be this way, as He controls all, not the reverse. When we say God's acts are all of necessity, we mean that all that God does is perfect, and perfection excludes all unnecessary actions. Thus, all He does is of necessity.

**Reader:** This question was emphasized in a book which I recently read, "Body of Faith". It's written by Michael Wyshogord, philosophy prof. who argues in the existentialist tradition, and is also an orthodox Jew- apparently studied with Rav Soloveitchik (?). It's an uncompromising attack on Maimonidean interpretations- he unhesitatingly calls his depersonification (not, of course, in the literal sense!) of God as dangerous and unbiblical. He attacks both Maimonidean and (at the other end of the spectrum) kabbalistic accounts of God which describe God as operating as a mechanistic entity to which we cannot relate on a personal level as did the players in the bible. How can God's absolute freedom be harmonized with a mechanistic understanding of his actions?

**Mesora:** God's "absolute freedom" as you put it is really a misnomer. God is not "free" to punish one who has no sin. Nor is he "free" to commit injustice on any level. Such limitation is in fact God's perfection. Imperfection is generated from ignorance or incapability, neither of which can be applied to God, as He knows all and He controls all. Creation is proof of this argument. This "mechanistic" view you use to describe God may be correct , but only in the sense that God does not change, as He stated through His prophet Malachi, in Chapter three. Again, an unchanging God means, that which is perfect, if changed, must be changed towards imperfection, and this cannot be true in application to God. This does not mean that God is unaware of us, He in fact relates to us, and interacts in our very lives. When and where, we cannot say, unless we see a miracle or are informed via His prophets, who currently do not exist. How God relates to man we cannot know as mortals. That He does relate, we see is true from the Torah's myriads of accounts between God and Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, the Twelve Tribes, Moses, Aaron, Miriam and so many others. □



# ADAM'S LONGEVITY AND THE PURPOSE OF LEARNING

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

Since youth we have read stories from Genesis, sometimes with much amazement. Of the personalities mentioned in Genesis what is striking is their longevity. Adam lived to the age of 930, and others lived until 1000 years. Currently, most of us do not exceed 100 years of age, so 1000 years seems unreal. These ages were real, however there are discussions among our Rabbis as to who lived that long aside from those named.

The Ramban's argument against the Maimonides, recorded by the Ramban in Genesis 5:4. The Ramban's reason for Adam's longevity is due to his being the "Handiwork of the Holy One". He was created in "absolute perfection as regards beauty, strength and might." The Ramban explains that because of man's sin and environmental changes after the flood and the dispersion, did man's lifespan decrease. The Ramban holds that all of mankind shared this longevity, and all mankind suffered a shorter lifespan.

The Ramban criticizes The Maimonides' opinion:

"Now what the Rabbi has written in the Moreh Nevuchim does not seem right to me, namely that the longevity was only in those individuals mentioned, while the rest of the people in those generations lived lives of ordinary natural length. He further said this exception was due to the mode of living and food of such people or by way of miracle. But these words are without substance. Why should this miracle happen to them since they were neither prophets nor righteous, nor worthy that a miracle be done for them, especially for generation after generation. And how could a proper mode of living and proper food prolong their years to the extent that they are so many times greater than that of the entire generation? It is possible that there were others who observed such a mode of living, in which case all or most of them should have attained similar longevity. And how did it happen that enough of the wisdom concerning this good mode of living did not come down to just one of all the sons of Noah after the flood (to enable him to match the longevity of his ancestors), for there was among them a little wisdom of their ancestors even though it steadily decreased from generation to generation?"

The Rabbis stated, "The purpose of learning is svara (definition)." Man

finds his ultimate goal in study when he "defines" what he perceives as the complete uniqueness of a given phenomena, law or any area of knowledge. That perception of a "new" previously not encountered phenomena means we perceived something "new" and are closer to our understanding of God's wisdom.

Studying the wisdom of the universe was central to Adam's purpose and longevity. Longevity represents the amount of knowledge available to man. Man can live to 1000 years and barely scratch the surface. Perhaps this is one of the reasons man initially was blessed with such long life. To partake in the essence of study, one defines the area at hand by seeking out "svara" in the opinion of the Maimonides and Ramban. The Maimonides (Maimonides) held that only those people mentioned in Scripture enjoyed longevity. The Ramban held all men sustained such duration of life. My understanding of the verses leads me to an additional reason for man's longevity, in accordance with Maimonides' theory that only those men mentioned actually lived that long.

The verses describing the lives of Adam and about ten of his direct descendants repeatedly follow 3 verses focusing on a singular idea. An example is this verse series found in Genesis 5:6-8:

5:6 And Seth (Adam's son) lived 105 years and bore Enosh. 5:7 And Seth lived after having bore Enosh 807 years and he bore sons and daughters. 5:8 And all the days of Enosh were 912 years and he died.

(This verse series repeats for about ten more men, only their age changes with their first son's birth and their total years lived.)

In this example, it is Seth's life that is mentioned due to his involvement in procreation. We read of Seth's age at the birth of his first son, and his years during his many offspring, and finally his age at his death. What is the significance of mentioning the first child, and that it is male? I believe it teaches us that Seth desired offspring and so he procreated. The first child mentioned teaches that Seth's participation in procreation establishes the world. A male child was considered a milestone. Since the male controls life it's significant that it be mentioned. Without male participation in intercourse, there are no offspring. In

the second verse with connection to Seth, he lived many years and had many offspring. Perhaps teaching the connection between lifespan and procreation. As procreation is God's will, Seth and others are granted longevity.

This theory would answer Ramban's critique of Maimonides: Maimonides thus holds that this miracle of longevity was not bestowed based on man's particular merits. Rather, God grants long life as He desires world population, and these men procreated. Procreation was their focus and we do not read about anything else in connection with the men listed here. According to Maimonides, all other members of mankind not mentioned during the beginning generations lived until 70 or 80 years.

An interesting insight into miracles is derived. Maimonides holds that God performs miracles to achieve a 'desired goal'. Although certain members of mankind benefited from this miracle of longevity, Maimonides holds that personal perfection is not necessarily a consideration when God renders miracles. What determined longevity was procreation. Ramban disagrees and says only perfected people could benefit from God's miracles. Therefore, the Ramban holds that mankind to have this longevity is due only to design. (Rashi says that initially man had 2 wives, one for procreation and one for sexual intercourse.) This teaches us that there were two distinct institutions then. Man could have selected both or one. This might corroborate Maimonides' theory that not all men merited longevity unless they selected procreation.

It was discussed that longevity contributed to man's self aggrandizement which ultimately drove him to sin against others through robbery and sexual promiscuity. By removing factors contributing to man's downfall is God's way of assisting man. Man's lifespan was decreased by God to assist man by removing man's focus on himself. His energies could be redirected towards the world of wisdom.

In summary, longevity was initially a blessing given to those who according to Maimonides procreated and according to the Ramban, those who were perfected. This also teaches that man can engage and content himself in study for many years. Since the knowledge available to man is endless even if he lived 1000 years. ■

## The Snakes' Head

(continued from page 1)

Sforno additionally teaches that man's perfection cannot be devoid of understanding. The gift of the Tzelem Elokim - the intellect - teaches us that God wills all our actions to be guided by reason. Therefore God's Torah must enable man to understand how all our commandments aim towards our perfection. Such an understanding cannot exist if we are ignorant of how the commandments perfect us as psychological beings. Knowledge of our psychological workings is therefore taught immediately in the opening sections of Genesis. King Solomon does the same in the opening of Ecclesiastes, Koheles. (It is very interesting that in the opening verses in both works, we find discussions of rivers.)



Sforno's lead also explains why we have two accounts of the creation of man: The first account is the creation of man as he is a Tzelem Elokim - an intelligent being. The second account omits any reference of the Tzelem Elokim, but refers to man as a "nefesh chaya", a living beast - the same description given to animals. Perhaps this subtle change intimates what each account addresses. This latter account, including the snake's deception, borrows the animal kingdoms' appellation of "living beast" and not "Tzelem Elokim" as it addresses the instinctual workings of man. ■

## Marketing Print Design Web Design

Developers of the  
JewishTimes  
and Mesora.org

we come to  
NYDesign.com

## TORAH IS YOUR LIFE

RIVKA OLENICK

(continued from page 1)

For many people "obedience" is mastery that itself constitutes enough of an effort since one may not necessarily desire to master the ideas. To "master and obey" Torah is the ideal, which unfortunately is not a priority in life for many. However, many people put great effort into mastering the business world and their obedience in doing so is not a problem! The pusuk above indicates "for it is your life and through this matter shall prolong your days on the Land". It is Torah that has the greatest effect on a person's life. What else can have such an impact that God promises you that it will prolong your life? The pusuk is saying that only Torah will prolong one's life. "This matter" is Torah itself. "It" - Torah - is your life. "It" - Torah - is not an empty "thing" for you.

Our entire life's purpose is tied to it and revolves around "this matter" - Torah. This is how the Creator set it up for us. Only a foolish person thinks that Torah is unsatisfying, as Rashi says: "the failure stems from you, you are lacking not the Torah." "Praiseworthy is the person who obeys your commandments and takes to his heart Your teachings and Your word." (The Shema) The Torah was given to us so that we would know how to live and flourish in the world that God created for us. According to the Rambam: "The commandments were given to us for two reasons; for the well being of our soul and the well being of our body".

"For it is not an empty thing for you" The purpose of our existence is to acquire the depth of knowledge contained in "it" the Torah and there is nothing contained in it that is irrelevant. All the knowledge a person accumulates in a lifetime is only a small portion of the Torah. When God created the world and created man every intricate aspect of both creations were put in place, nothing was created without purpose. And so too every single idea in the Torah is significant, and has relevance not even one statement in it is insignificant! "His words are living and enduring, faithful and delightful forever to all eternity for our forefathers and for us, for our children and for our generations, and for all the generations of Your servant Israel's offspring." (The Shema). His words are alive and everlasting, true and pleasant forever and eternal from our forefathers, for us and for future generations. These words are not dull and repetitive and the commandments and one's obedience to

them are not boring and mechanical.

There are enough tasks in daily life that can easily become dull and repetitive. Not so with Torah. Not so with the ideas that are always fresh and alive, and the commandments that we can derive fulfillment from, that bring satisfaction and peace to one's mind. As stated above sustaining the "well being" of the soul and the body is the purpose of the Torah. To engage one's mind in chachma and one's body in service by fulfilling the commandments each day as if they are brand new. Imagine! And if we should find all of this unsatisfying then it is oneself we should examine. It is our own confused sense of reality we should reflect upon. How are we living our life? After all, the Creator created us for a purpose with a nature such that we could fulfill our purpose. God gave us His Divine word perfect and absolute. He introduced us to every possible way in which to obtain His divine truths, through the written and oral Torah. In our tefila we ask God for clarity of thought and for insight so that we can comprehend His truths and live our lives in the most beneficial and optimal way that results from this comprehension. Each one of us according to our capability can develop a deep love for Torah thought and a more sincere approach to the mitzvos. This is what we encourage others to do as well, as Hillel said: "Be of the disciples of Aaron, loving peace and pursuing peace, loving the created beings, and bringing them near to the Torah." Pirkei Avos 1:12.

Turn off the empty brain television and the pretentious videos and put away those hollow novels. Instead, learn and enjoy the awesome and nourishing truths of the Torah that bring sanity and peace of mind. These are only some of the "rewards" Rashi is talking about and there are continuous "rewards" to come when we direct our minds to the precious ideas contained within in our Torah. ignorantly view the Torah as a book like all others. What a mistake to equate a human author with God, One so distinct, man cannot ever arrive at any positive knowledge of Him, "You cannot see me and live". Scientists project their limited scope of physical knowledge onto the metaphysical Torah, without having toiled in the Talmudic and Scriptural reasoning and teachings of the Rabbis, the Torah authorities. We have a Mesora, a tradition, handed down to us from Moses, regarding the method of learning Torah. Torah knowledge is acquired only after years of submerging oneself with a mentor who himself received tutelage from others.

Let the scientist first educate himself on this vast area and style for a few decades. Once he becomes a Torah scholar, I am sure he will withdraw his comments with much humility. ■

## Why□ Adam's Fate is Ours

**Reader:** How is it fair that all humanity suffer for Adam's and Eve's mistakes? Even if you say it was still during the days of creation - why don't we get a shot at immortality without the resurrection deal? Doesn't seem quite fair, and G-d is fair?

**Mesora:** Good question. The reason we "suffer" Adam's fate is not a punishment for something we didn't do. We share Adam's design, and therefore require the same rectification which he experienced through God's mercy of sparing the species of humans. Adam demonstrated that he ("he" as in all mankind) could not exist in the pristine form in which God created him. He represented all mankind, not just himself. God's correction in his nature is in reality a correction not just for Adam, but for all man. God did not change Adam. God changed man. ■

## who is Better?

In the sixth of his "Eight Chapters", (found at the commencement of Tractate Avos) Maimonides distinguishes between the two types of people who refrain from sin: 1) The suppressor of one's instincts, and 2) The one attached to the good, who doesn't need to suppress. He compares the words of the philosophers who bring seemingly contradictory statements: "One who is naturally attached to the good is better than one who is not." And another statement, "One who suppresses his desires is better than one who does not."

So, who is better? It seems like a powerful contradiction.

But Maimonides carefully analyzes the statements of the Rabbis and leads us to the answer. He quotes further statements:

A. "Rabbi Simeon son of Gamliel states, 'One should not say 'I do not desire meat and milk, wearing shaatnez and sexually prohibited acts'. But one should say 'I do desire meat and milk, wearing shaatnez and sexually prohibited acts, but what shall I do, my Father in heaven commanded me against them.'"

B. "One who does not desire murder, stealing and embarrassing parents is better than one who does." ■

We must ask a crucial question: What do the Rabbis mean by one is "better"? We must have a framework in which to gauge who is "better", better at what?

I believe "better" must be defined as "who is closer to the truth". Maimonides intends to show how statements A and B are in no contradiction. He does so by defining the area in which each statement applies. Statement A is dealing with one set of ideals, distinct from statement B.

Statement A Maimonides calls the "Mitzvos Sichlyos" or "Intelligent Laws". "Had we not been commanded in them, our intelligence would still demand we follow them." They include the types of commands as he mentioned, murder, stealing and embarrassing parents. In these areas, since one's mind would demand they be followed even without Divine commands, if one still years for them, he is not "better". His mind is corrupt. Thus the term "Intelligent Laws". One whose desires are not attached to these areas is more perfect, more in line with the truth than one who is attached.

Not so regarding the second area, "HaToros HaShamyus". The Rabbis said, "Man is commanded to desire sins." Also, "The Rabbis warned that we do not deny these desires are in our nature".

Maimonides is showing the utmost consistency in the words of the Rabbis. In both cases, we are bidden to attach ourselves to the truth. In this second area, we are dealing with man's natural drives, i.e., "meat and milk, wearing shaatnez and sexually prohibited acts". These are part of man's inherent, psychological structure. There is no man who does not desire 1) sex, 2) food, and 3) clothing. Translated into our psychological faculties as 1) the sexual drive, 2) the appetitive drive, and 3) the ego. In this area, to say "I do not desire these", is a complete denial of our psychological reality. One is not better - closer to the truth - when denying his very nature. It is as if to say, "I deny that I bleed when I am cut." This statement is as distant from the truth as one who says "I do not desire sex, food or clothing."

When examined clearly by Maimonides, we realize that the two statements which originally seemed contradictory, are actually complimentary. Who is "better" really means, "Who is closer to the truth".

In the area of intelligent laws, one is closer to the truth when he admits what his mind tells him, that murder destroys the very society in which he himself desires to dwell. In the instinctual laws, again, man is "better", closer to the truth, when he admits what his mind tells him - that he has desires.

One who denies his desires, or one who desires murder are both far from the truth.

Who is "better"? One who is attached to the truth. ■