

"If Israel would walk  
in My ways, in an instant  
I would subdue their foes."

*Psalms 81*

Israel's weakness and source of failure  
is her leaders' need to appease the  
world. If Israel would find God's  
words more true than man's, she  
would be victorious – instantly.  
Sadly, our leaders don't trust God.

5757  
5770  
13  
YEARS

# JewishTimes

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## IN THIS ISSUE

PARA ADUMA	1-3
AHRON'S DEATH	1,6,7
TORAH: OPTIONAL?	1,4,5
CREATION THEORIES	7
TORAH SHINES	8
KABBALA	9,10

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## Weekly Parsha

# Chukat

RABBI BERNIE FOX

"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 born a yoke" (BeMidbar 19:2)

Rashi is probably the most widely

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## Weekly Parsha

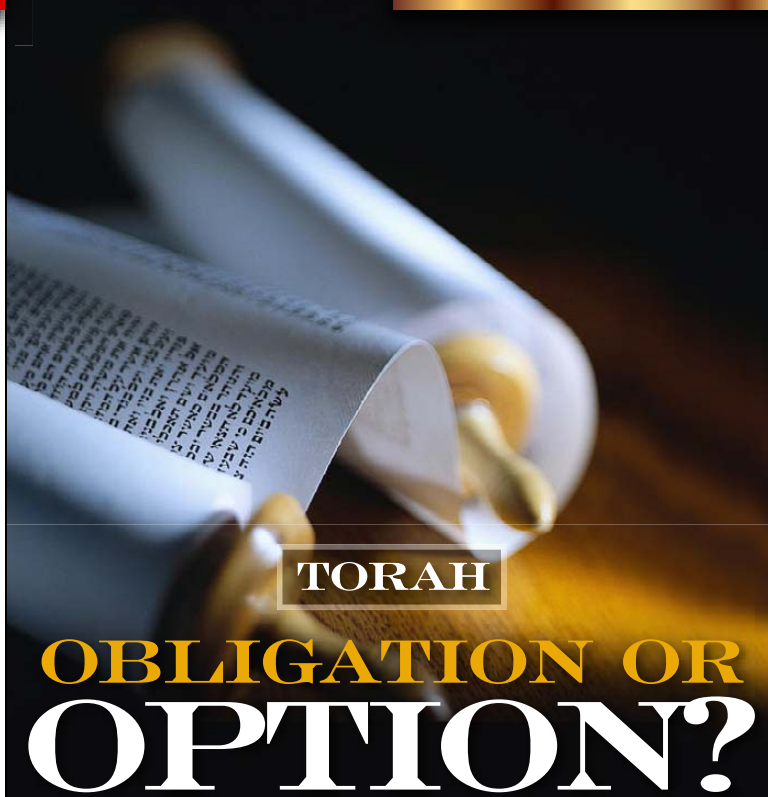
# The Timeless Impact of Aharon's Death

RABBI DR. DARREL GINSBERG

The end of Aharon's life was a tremendous tragedy for Bnai Yisrael, as evidenced by their intense and long mourning after his death. Aharon had a profound effect on the nation, but his significance for them was twofold. Firstly, he was a leader, Moshe's right hand who represented Torah and mitzvos, beloved and admired by all. Yet, he was also the kohen gadol, the person entrusted with the daily activities of the Mishkan. That was his job and in that respect, he had a specific role that was unique to him alone. It is the events surrounding his death that help elucidate these two personas, crucial to our perspective on Aharon and his relationship with Bnai Yisrael. The main thrust of the Torah's description of Aharon's death dealt with the transfer of the bigdei kehuna, the priestly garments, to his son, Elazar. The Torah describes the commandment from God and the subsequent events (Bamidbar 20:22-28):

(continued on page 6)

## Fundamentals



TORAH

# OBLIGATION OR OPTION?

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

Do we have a choice to follow Torah? Of course, all individuals possess free will. What I ask here is something different: did God present to man the Torah lifestyle as an option, or as an inescapable obligation? Reviewing history, Adam and all Noachides were not given their commands by choice. Adam was commanded – without option – not to eat of the fruit and not to violate idolatry. (Sanhedrin, 56b) Noachides too have no choice regarding their laws. (ibid) When I say "no choice", I mean that disobedience meets with punishment, regardless of a Noachide accepting God's authority and system. Noah's sinful and uncorrectable generation was killed, and Babel's generation met with dispersion as their correction.

Egypt was destroyed for not following God, as were other peoples.

(continued on page 4)

(Chukat cont. from pg. 1)

## Weekly Parsha

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studied commentary on the Chumash. There are many comments of Rashi that are well-known and widely quoted. Unfortunately, in some cases these comments are quoted so frequently that we neglect to consider them carefully. As soon as we hear the beginning of the comment, we finish the quote in our minds and do not even think carefully about Rashi's observation. The first comment of Rashi on this week's parasha is one of those oft quoted texts, which may need more attention than it normally receives.

Before considering Rashi's comments, let us first carefully study the pasuk it is intended to interpret. The pasuk above 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 spiritual defilement are treated with these ashes.

The passage describes the mitzvah of Parah Adumah as chukat ha'torah. In the translation above, this has been rendered to mean "the law of the Torah." But this translation is an oversimplification. The term chok – as in chukat – is used widely in the Chumash. The term generally has three meanings. In most instances the term is used to identify the permanence of a mitzvah or law. In fact, the Torah clearly makes this connection by frequently using the term chok in the phrase chukat olam – a permanent chok. For example, the Chumash tells us the observance of Pesach is a chukat olam – a chok for all generations.[1] Here, the term chok communicates this idea of permanence.

In some instances the term chok refers to a right or portion assigned to a person or group by some authority. For example, there was a chok in Yosef's time that the leaders of Egypt were awarded by Paroh a portion of land.[2] Similarly, the Chumash tells us that after the death of Nadav and Avihu, Moshe instructed the remaining kohanim that despite this tragedy they must still eat their chok – their portion – from the sacrifices offered that day.[3]

However, there are some instances in which neither of these translations seems appropriate. In these cases, the term chok seems to communicate that the law is a decree from Hashem. For example, in explaining the laws of Pesach Sheynee – a Pesach sacrifice brought by those who could not offer the sacrifice at its normal time – Moshe explains that the Pesach sacrifice must be offered according to all of

its chukotav – according to its chok.[4] In this instance it is clear that the term chok does not mean "portion" and does not seem to be a reference to the permanence of the law for all generations. Therefore, in this instance and in other cases in which the first two translations do not apply, Targum Unkelus renders the term to mean "decree."

So, what is the meaning of the term chok in our passage? Clearly it does not mean "portion" and there is no obvious reason to assume that the term is a reference to permanence. It is not surprising that Targum Unkelus renders the term to mean "decree."

It is now possible to more accurately translate our pasuk as "this is the decree of the torah." However, the meaning – and even the translation – of the pasuk is still somewhat unclear. There is another problem. What does the term torah mean? The term torah is used occasionally in the Chumash to refer to the entire corpus of law contained in the Chumash. However, this is not the usual manner in which the term is used. Generally, the term refers to a set of detailed laws regulating a specific process. For example, the Chumash introduces the laws regulating the offering of the Mincha sacrifice with the phrase "this is the torah of the Mincha offering." [5] In fact when the term is used to refer to the entire corpus of law contained in the Chumash it is likely that the term is being employed in a similar manner. The term Torah – used in this context – refers to the entire system of detailed laws regulating the various elements of our personal and national lives.

So, what does the term torah mean in our pasuk? It seems unlikely that the term refers to the entire corpus of law. If that were the reference, then pasuk would mean this is the decree of the entire Torah – implying that there is only this one single decree in the entire system of law outlined in the Chumash. However, there are many decrees included in the Chumash! Therefore, Rashbam rejects this explanation of the term torah in our passage. He suggests that the term torah refers to the detailed laws presented latter in the parasha concerning the transmission on tumah – spiritual defilement – by a dead body.[6] According to Rashbam it seems that the meaning of our passage is that there is an element within the laws of tumah and taharah – spiritual defilement and purification – that must be regarded as a decree. This element is the mitzvah regarding the Parah Adumah – the red heifer.

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This raises an obvious question. Why is the mitzvah of Parah Adumah singled out from the laws regulating tumah and taharah and referred to as a decree? This seems to be the question that prompts Rashi's comments.

Before we can consider Rashi's response, we must consider a preliminary issue. As explained above, the term *chok* has three alternative meanings. The term often communicates the permanence of a mitzvah. Sometimes the term refers to a portion or right awarded by an authority. In other instances – as in our passage – it means “decree.” It is unlikely that the Torah would use one term in three completely different ways. Is there some common denominator between these three usages of the term *chok*? It seems that the term *chok* always makes reference to a law that rests on authority. A law is permanent because it comes from Hashem. A portion or right that is awarded by authority derives its significance through the sponsorship of the authority that bestows the right or portion. A decree is – by definition – a law that is based on the authority of the body of king that establishes the decree.

This gives more meaning to our passage. The *pasuk* is communicating that the mitzvah of Parah Adumah – in some sense – is to be understood as resting on and dependant upon the law-giver. In this case the law-giver is Hashem. In other words, in describing this mitzvah as a decree, the Chumash is communicating that appreciation of the mitzvah of Parah Adumah requires that we recognize the authority – Hashem – who has decreed it. What special characteristic of the mitzvah of Parah Adumah demands this recognition?

Finally, we are ready for Rashi's comments. Rashi explains that the Satan and the nations of the world taunt the Jewish people regarding this commandment. They ask, “What kind of mitzvah is this and what is its reason?” Therefore the Chumash tells us that is a decree from Hashem. We are not permitted to cast suspicion upon it.[7]

It's clear from Rashi's comments that there is some odd element in the mitzvah of Parah Adumah that is destined to evoke ridicule. What is this element? Many commentaries suggest that this ridicule would focus on a specific odd law regarding the Parah. As we have explained, the ashes of this Parah are used in the purification process from severe forms of tumah. However, in their preparation the ashes actually transmit tumah. In other words, one who comes into contact with and handles the ashes during their preparation is himself defiled. So, these ashes which are a source of defilement are somehow able to restore purity![8]

However, this does not seem to be the issue that concerned Rashi. Rashi bases his comments on a text from the Talmud. In his commentary on that text, Rashi explains more fully the difficulty in understanding the mitzvah of Parah Adumah. He explains that Parah Adumah is one of the commandments in the Torah for which there is no apparent explanation or apparent benefit. He explains that this characteristic evokes the criticism of the he Satan and the nations of the world. They argue that the Torah cannot possibly be true! How can the Torah be true if it commands us to perform mitzvot that have no apparent benefit? To this criticism the Chumash responds that these mitzvot are decrees from Hashem and rest upon his authority. [9]

Let us now summarize Rashi's comments. The Torah alerts us that the mitzvah of Parah Adumah is a decree. Rashi explains that this alert is important because this mitzvah is one of a group that have no apparent rational or purpose. This characteristic will expose these commandments to criticism and ridicule. The Satan and the nations of the world will challenge the truth of a system of law that includes commandments that have no apparent purpose. We are to respond that these commandments are decrees from Hashem and therefore, rest on His authority.

Frankly, it seems unlikely that the wily Satan and hostile nations of the world will be much impressed by this argument. These critics obviously do not accept the authenticity of the revelation at Sinai. Yet, we are advised to respond to their disparagement with the reminder that the mitzvot are Hashem's decrees!

Again, Rashi's comments on the Talmud provide a clearer understanding of his intention. Rashi explains that the term “Satan” is a reference to the *yetzer harah* – our own internal evil inclination.[10] In other words, Rashi is describing an internal dialogue. The response that Rashi and the Talmud are suggesting is not intended for the person the scoffs at revelation. Instead, it is designed to respond to our own internal doubts. When others criticize mitzvot like Parah Adumah that have no apparent reason or when we ourselves are mislead by our own internal desires, we are to remind ourselves that these seemingly arbitrary commandments are decrees from Hashem and rest on His authority.

Still, Rashi's comments are difficult to fully understand. Rashi is describing an internal debate that may take place within us. But the nature of this debate remains unclear. If a person is experiencing doubts about the truth of the Torah, how will one be rescued with a reminder that these troubling mitzvot are Hashem's decrees?

Klee Yakar provides an important insight into this issue. After quoting Rashi's comments, he explains that the criticism described by Rashi is not at all unreasonable. He explains that we have every reason to expect the mitzvot to make sense. The Chumash tells us that if we observe the commandments the nations of the world will admire us. They will praise us as a wise and understanding nation.[11],[12] This insights suggests a clearer understanding of the internal dialogue described by Rashi. Klee Yakar suggests that we are to conduct ourselves in a way that demonstrates the deep wisdom of the Torah. However, this very obligation evokes a problem. How are we to conduct ourselves as intelligent and wise individuals if we are required to observe commandments that have no obvious meaning? It is natural to be troubled by this paradox. In fact, to not be concerned with this issue, suggests that one is not committed to the obligation to conduct one's affairs intelligently. It is inevitable that a person who takes this obligation seriously will experience a deep level of confusion. How do we respond to this confusion?

Now, let us reconsider the response discussed by Rashi. There are two important marks of intelligence. First, it is incumbent upon us to try to understand and appreciate the wisdom of the mitzvot. We cannot regard ourselves as wise, intelligent individuals if we close our minds to contemplation. But there is a second element of wisdom. We must have humility. True wisdom should generate a sense of humility. Humility demands that we recognize the limits of our own insight. A humble person recognizes that there are some mysteries that he cannot resolve. Just as there are elements of the created universe that defy human understanding, it is reasonable to assume that there may be elements of the revealed law that are not completely within human grasp. Therefore, by recognizing the source of the Torah we can resolve our confusion. ■

[1] Sefer Shemot 12:14.

[2] Sefer Beresheit 47:22.

[3] Sefer VaYikra 10:13.

[4] Sefer BeMidbar 9:12

[5] Sefer VaYikra 6:7

[6] Rabbaynu Shemuel ben Meir (Rashbam) Commentary on Sefer BeMidbar 19:2.

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

[8] Rabbaynu Ovadia Sforno, Commentary on Sefer Beresheit, 9:2.

[9] Rabbaynu Shlomo ben Yitzchak (Rashi), Commentary on the Talmud, Mesechet Yoma 67b.

[10] Rabbaynu Shlomo ben Yitzchak (Rashi), Commentary on the Talmud, Mesechet Yoma 67b.

[11] Sefer Devarim 4:6

[12] Rabbaynu Shlomo Ephraim Lontshitz, Commentary Klee Yakar on Sefer BeMidbar 19:2.

This teaches that these societies were in violation, and thus, God must have previously warned them not to violate. (Sanhedrin 56b) All these cultures and peoples had no defense had they claimed they never accepted God's laws. Violation was met with punishment.

In Mara, en route to Sinai, the lesson of punishment is again taught. The Jews had thirsted three days and the waters finally located at Mara were bitter and undrinkable. The waters were then made sweet through a miracle, and they drank. Moses then instructed the people (Exod. 15:26) "If you will listen to God's voice, perform what is upright in His eyes, heed God's commands and guard His statutes, then God will not place any of the sicknesses upon the you that He had placed upon Egypt".

Up to this point, all seems consistent: all members of mankind were not presented with an option to decline God's Noahide laws, where such a rejection would exempt them from punishment. The contrary is true: God punished man for rejecting God's Noahide laws, whether they accepted them or not.

However, in Exodus 24:7 we read of Moses' recital of many laws before the Jews; and the Jews' subsequent response of "Naaseh v'Nishma", "We will do and we will listen". Does this imply that here, man was offered an option? In Mara, the Jews were taught laws, and in Exodus 19:1-8, when the Jews first arrived at Sinai, Moses presented the elders with God's treaty of the Torah:

*"In the third month of the exodus of the Children of Israel from Egypt, on this day they came to the Sinai desert. And they journeyed from Rephidim and they came to the Sinai desert; and the Children of Israel camped in the desert, and the Jews camped facing the mountain. And Moses ascended to God and God called to him from the mountain saying, "So shall you speak to the house of Jacob, and tell the Children of Israel: You have seen what I have done to Egypt and I carried you on eagle's wings and I brought you to Me. And now, if you certainly listen to My voice and guard my covenant, then you will be to Me a treasure from all peoples, for unto Me is the entire Earth. And you will be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation". These are the words you shall speak to the Children of Israel". And Moses came and called to the elders of the people and he placed before them all these words, which God had commanded. And the entire nation answered as one and they said, "All that God has spoke we will do". And Moses reported their response to God."*

Did God tell Moses to offer the Children of Israel a "choice" to accept Torah? And had the nation rejected the Torah, would they be exempt from punishments for violating what is written? This would be completely inconsistent with God's relationship with Noahides, who had no option.

Later in Deuteronomy (Deut. 29:14) another Torah bris (treaty) is created between God and the Jews prior to entering Israel: "And not with you alone do I make this bris and this curse, but with all standing here with us today before Hashem our God, and with all those who are not here today". Now it appears the Jews are in receipt of an imposed system; one that is obligatory even upon future generations, not yet alive to decide for themselves. Certainly this proves that Torah is not optional.

Regarding this latter treaty we learn of horrific curses for our violation, and the response of the nations (Deut. 19:23):

*"And all the nations will say, 'On what account has God done this to the land? What caused this great, heated fury?' And they will answer, 'On account that they [the Jews] abandoned the treaty of God of their fathers which He made with them when He took them out of Egypt. And they served other gods and they bowed to them'..."*

What new consideration demanded this new Torah treaty where God would lay waste to the land? Why was the land brought into the equation? And which way is it: is Torah a choice, or an option?

### God's Relationship with Mankind

It was an act of great kindness that God created our species that can arrive at such a deeply fulfilling existence through studying His wisdom. Man alone possesses intelligence, as this is God's intent for us. This is where we will find the deepest gratification. By commanding Adam not to eat of the fruit and abstain from idolatry, God taught mankind that we are servants, and thus, God's instructions are to be heeded. We must not freely engage in all physical desires (prohibition of fruit) and we must view our relationship with God as a servant before his only Master (idolatry). God's act of "commanding" Adam laid down the rule: He is the Master and we are servants. But of course, God does not need man, or anything. His creation of our species is for our benefit alone.

We should view His plan for us as our only choice. It is the greatest good He can offer us, as He clearly indicates which choices we must make; those that lead to happiness and success. He is like a teacher giving us the answers before the test. Yes, ultimately we choose all our actions. But this does not mean that no repercussions and unhappiness await the wrong choices. On God's words "And guard my treaty [of Torah]" (Exod. 19:5), Sforno comments: "In the manner that I will not need to do to you as I have done to Egypt". Meaning, if we did not follow the Torah when it was presented, we would suffer the consequences. Sforno teaches that Torah was not an option.

Ramban (Exod. 19:7) "Choose for yourselves today if you will follow the Torah"

The obvious question is this: if the Jews were not being given the option of following or rejecting the Torah, for what reason were they 'presented' with it, and for what reason did they respond "Naaseh v'Nishma"? This seems to be a response to an option. Let's read the exact words again, which the Torah records upon the Jews' arrival at Sinai:

*"And Moses came and called to the elders of the people and he placed before them all these words, which God had commanded. And the entire nation answered as one and they said, "All that God has spoke we will do". And Moses reported their response to God."*

There's one more source that sheds light on our question. Talmud Avoda Zara 2b, quoting Havakuk 3: 6 says that at one point in history, "God arose, assessed mankind, He 'saw' and released the nations from their 7 Noahide commands." The Talmud asks, "What did God 'see'?" The Talmud answers, "He saw that the nations abandoned the Noahide laws, and therefore God released them from their obligation."

We know this release is not factual, so how do we understand this?

The Talmud concludes that as the nations abandoned Noahide laws, any future Noahide who followed the laws would be considered as one "not commanded". This means that once the chain of transmission of Noahide law was broken, no future Noahide could say he was "following God", since the transmission that God commanded these laws was lost from society. As such, man's adherence to any of these "laws" would not be out of obedience to

(continued on next page)

God, but of societal practicality, “as if” God released them. Thus, such individuals could not be rewarded as “followers of God”. It is only one who truly lives as God desires. It was for this reason that God gave Adam at least one command. For without any command, Adam would not know from nature alone that he is to serve God. But now commanded, Adam’s actions can be rightfully considered as “following God”. So God never released the Noahides from their laws. The Talmud is teaching that when the transmission of Noahide law was lost, people were viewed as if not commanded, since if they happened to follow any of the 7 by chance, they were not following “God’s word”, but rather, society.

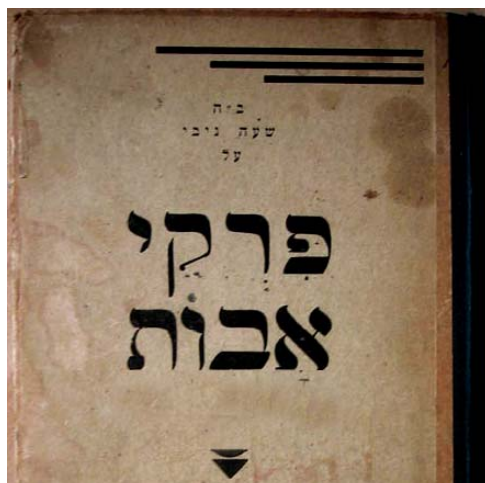
Similarly, most scientists today study the universe without a yearning to draw closer to the Creator. They are content to solve problems and discover new laws. This alone is intriguing, as they are using their minds, and they are amazed at what they find. Yet, tragically, they miss the mark. Moses was different, as he asked God to unveil more of His nature, “Show me Your honor”. (Exod. 33:18) Moses was intrigued beyond compare. He thirsted to learn about the Creator, not only the creation. This offers man the most fulfilling existence. Following or studying ideas without the appreciation of the Designer, falls infinitely short of our purpose, and our fulfillment. We have the capacity to establish a “relationship” with the Creator. Maimonides teaches (Hilchos Teshuva 7:7) that a sinner might be disgusting, distant and abominable before God one day, but with repentance, he becomes loved and desirous, close and beloved. This teaches that we are to strive to establish, and maintain a ‘relationship’ with God.

Love of God is the highest expression of human perfection. Without God as our focus, the greatest scientist does not fulfill his role for which he was created. Nor does he reach the level of fulfillment possible for him. One wise Rabbi would say this after uncovering a new idea in Talmud: “Let’s enjoy the idea”. He would add that one’s studies must eventuate in an appreciation for God, and not stop at the idea alone.

Perhaps this is why Moses placed before the Jews all these words, which “God had commanded.” And also why the entire nation answered “All that God has spoken” we will do. Moses and the nation realized the core issue is that this system “emanates from God”, and that He is the focus, and our drawing near to Him is

our objective. The answer of “Naaseh v’Nishma” was not stated as a response to an option, for the Jews and no people were ever given an option. “Naaseh v’Nishma” was stated as a realization that as God commanded us in Torah, this is the sum total of human life. “We will do” was the Jews’ expression that without Torah, life is truly meaningless. Immediately after this statement, God tells Moses He will orchestrate Revelation at Sinai so the people possess proof of the system as truly divine. God thereby gave us the means by which that generation, and all future generations, would have proof of the Torah’s divine nature. We would have all necessary to arrive at a love of God. But I feel it is significant that prior to the overwhelming event of Revelation, the Jews had already agreed to the Torah system, based on the fundamentals taught to them prior to that event, and their salvation. And although Moses presented God’s words to the elders, it was the entire nation that responded and accepted Torah.

So all is consistent: from Adam through Noahides and through Israelites, all systems and laws were given without option.



Rabbi Elazar Hakfar stated (Avos 4:22):

*“Against your will you are formed, against your will you are born, against your will you live, against your will you die, and against your will you are destined to give a judgment and accounting before the King, King of all kings, the Holy One, blessed be He.”*

Some may ask, “What justice is there in a system that is thrown upon mankind, without option?” The response is as follows. Man cannot say he will reject Torah, and have any claim that “Since I never accepted it, I should not be punished”. For both Torah, and human life are God’s creations. To say “I will live


without Torah”, is to say that I wish to enjoy only one of God’s creations – my own existence – but abandon the other creation – Torah. However, God did not create us to live with abandon. We have free will to do as we wish and reject Torah. But we must be honest that we are unjustified, we waste our lives, we violate God’s will...and we will suffer the consequences. If we are realistic, we will agree that our coming into existence was not up to us, so the terms of our continued existence to are not open to discussion.

Throughout time, with no favoring of one people over another, God made man’s mission clear, and without option. This is for our good. But we will only realize this good with Torah study. If we avoid honest inquiry into the mitzvos and ideals, into the beauty of the halachik system...we will be frustrated with every fast, with every holiday, and with all mitzvos that take us away from our emotional drives and plans. That is why people are non-observant: they have never witnessed the enjoyment of study, or the philosophy of Torah that rings true and clear. They are convinced that their lifestyle cannot be improved. They fear any detachment from their pleasures, and they are weak and not courageous enough to trust those wiser than they are.

God is concerned with all mankind. This explains the response of the nations when God uses the Land of Israel as a tool for education. When the Jews observe, all will go well, with great blessings. This endorses the Torah’s bountiful promises. And when we disobey God and violate His Torah, we suffer such severe consequences about which the nations say, “On account that the Jews abandoned the treaty of God of their fathers which He made with them when He took them out of Egypt.” God desires the Jews to function as a “treasure from all peoples”, “a kingdom of priests and a holy nation”.

I say this many times: you have one life; don’t waste this one chance. And if you know of others who at present do not observe Torah, do all in your power to attract them, create strong friendships with them, and enlighten them so you give them everlasting life. And don’t stop at one person; create classes at regular intervals. God taught you, now you must teach others. “Rabbi Meir said, ‘One who learns Torah and does not teach it, upon him it says, “The words of God he despises’.” (Talmud Sanhedrin 99a) ■





“They traveled from Kodeish, and the entire community of Bnei Yisroel came to Mount Hor. God spoke to Moshe and Aharon at Mount Hor, at the border of the land of Edom, saying, ‘Aharon will now be gathered (die) to his people, for he shall not enter the land that I have given to Bnei Yisroel, because you defied My word at the waters of dispute. Take Aharon and his son Elazar, and bring them up to Mount Hor. Remove Aharon’s vestments and dress his son Elazar in them; Aharon will be gathered in and die there.’ Moshe did as God commanded; and they went up Mount Hor in the presence of the entire community. Moshe then removed Aharon’s vestments and dressed Aharon’s son, Elazar, in them; Aharon died there on top of the mountain, and Moshe and Elazar descended from the mountain.”

What begs questioning in this communication from God is the importance of ensuring that Aharon’s specific garments be handed over to Elazar. Why not make a new set of bigdei kehuna (the specific ones for the kohen gadol) for Elazar?

Furthermore, why have this whole procedure take place publicly on the mountain? Moshe could have taken Aharon up and then returned from the mountain with his clothes. And why was it necessary for Moshe to be involved in this process altogether?

The Ramban expands on the events that took place on the mountain, quoting a Midrash (ibid 26):

“According to the Midrash of our Rabbis there were miracles done for them, they said ‘how could Moshe remove the clothes from Aharon in order? Aren’t the above ones above and the lower ones lower? Rather, there were miracles done by God in his death more so than his life. Moshe took him to the rock and removed the priestly garments, and the Divine garments (bigdei shechina) were worn underneath. ‘And he dressed Elazar his son’ - and how could he dress Elazar in order? Rather, a great honor was apportioned by God to Aharon in his death more so than his life, since he had on the Divine garments at first underneath, and Moshe then returned and removed from Aharon the garments in order and placed them on Elazar in order...”

What is this Midrash teaching us?

Why should we be concerned about the possible change in the order of the removal/placing of these garments?

Why the need for this elaborate process? For the first time, there was going to be a new kohen gadol, someone other than Aharon to occupy this exalted position. The fact that there was a commandment from God as to this process meant there was an idea to be expressed. It was not simply handing off the baton to the next one in line. The specific concept may be tied into an understanding of the two types of leaders of Bnai Yisrael, the melech (Jewish king) and the kohen gadol.

There are certain similarities that exist between the two. For example, both appointments required the approval of the Sanhedrin, both required being anointed with oil as an act of designation (the kohen gadol could also just don the extra garments to acquire his status), and both were given special kavod by the nation. Obviously, their functions were completely different, yet an important idea emerges from this dissimilarity. Each new king that arose to lead the Jewish people would put his own imprint on his reign. The king would bring with him a unique personality and different attributes. There would be opportunities to apply his own mind to tackle whatever set of problems faced Bnai Yisrael. He could choose to declare war, raise taxes, or numerous other actions indicative of the position. While constantly guided by the Torah, the king still had the means to express himself through his reign and act independently of his predecessor or successor. Such was not the case with the kohen gadol.

The person occupying this position naturally had to be on a very high level, possessing superior intellect and middos, among other attributes. However, the very role itself did not allow for any individual expression whatsoever. The job of the kohen gadol, and of all the kohanim, was to be vehicles in the performance of avodas Hashem, worship of God. There was no opportunity for individualistic expressions of creativity or imagination in the avoda of the Bais Hamikdash. The kohen gadol needed to remove all sense of self, to sublimate his ego and recognize he is “working” before the Creator and King. This concept is crystallized in the clothes worn by the kohen gadol. Each garment was fabricated based on the word of God – there was no human creativity or mark of individuality possible in their invention (so too with the vessels). Furthermore, the purpose of each garment was not to position the kohen gadol as the arbiter of high fashion. Instead, each garment reflected a fundamental idea, helping to focus the mind and psyche of the kohen gadol towards God during his service.

The main idea here is that there really was no unique “individual” with each new kohen gadol. This helps explain the importance of the same garments being used. If Moshe constructed a new

(continued on next page)

(Ahron continued from page 6)

## Weekly Parsha

set of clothes for Elazar, one would think that there would be something different and unique about Elazar's service in the Bais Hamikdash versus Aharon's. While they were two different people, their avoda (worship) was identical, both in form and function. Finally, Moshe's role can be understood as well. Moshe was functioning as God's messenger, the intermediary in this process. Had Aharon handed over his garments to Elazar, it would imply a personal involvement in this transition. Moshe functioning as the go-between demonstrated Aharon's complete removal from the process.

Within this very idea lies the unique phenomenon of Aharon's position as kohen gadol. It was critical to separate who Aharon was as a person from his role as kohen gadol for fear of a distorted view of the kehuna. Bnai Yisrael would consider Aharon, due to both his personality and perfection, and due to his being the first kohen gadol, as the "greatest kohen gadol", the paradigm of kehuna, the one who set the standard for what kehuna should be. To view Aharon as a qualitatively superior kohen gadol would by definition apply the individualistic character anathema to the Bais Hamikdash. Moreover, the direct result of this belief would be Elazar being both different, and somehow inferior, in his new role as kohen gadol. The Midrash illuminates this point. The idea being expressed is that there was no differentiation whatsoever that emerged in passing along the kohen gadol role to Elazar. Even a change in the order of removal and adorning could create this sense of differentiation, the process being one way by Aharon but different with Elazar. Any inkling of this would lead to the inappropriate view of the kohen gadol.

The success of this objective can be seen in Bnai Yisrael's mourning for Aharon. The Torah records that (ibid 29) the "entire House of Israel" mourned for Aharon. Rashi (ibid) explains this reference to the entire nation as follows:

"Men and women, because Aharon pursued peace, and instilled affection between antagonists, and between husband and wife".

They mourned for the unique person Aharon was, his perfection, his desire for peace, his ability to bring the nation together. But they did not mourn not for him as the kohen gadol. This institution continued on, without interruption. The expression of this separation demonstrated Bnai Yisrael's internalization of this idea.

This is a concept that extends beyond the kehuna. The same duality that exists with Aharon exists in many ways in all of us. On the one hand, the Torah, through learning, affords us a unique opportunity for personal creativity and innovation. Each area of

Torah knowledge has within it infinite ideas, waiting to be uncovered by those who pursue them. At the same time, we are subservient to the halachic system. We are obligated to carry the mitzvos and in that role, there is no room for individuality. While we may follow a different psak with respect to halacha, we do not have the right to daven, keep Shabbos or perform mitzvos the way 'we' see fit. In regards to our obligation to follow the mitzvos, we are not superior or inferior to the generations that came before us or that will exist when we are gone. We do not get to put a special stamp on our observance,

nor veer from the guidelines that have been prescribed. With Aharon's death, the importance of this duality comes to light, guiding us in our pursuit of knowledge of Hashem. ■

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## Aristotle, Plato and Rambam: On Creation

Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim

**Francesca:** In today's class, did we conclude that there are some things that will not be conclusively provable one way or the other? Thus, we go with the Rambam because we do hold the Torah was given by God?

This question is in regards to the eternity of the universe as a natural result of God creating it initially and then it continuing to exist as a result vs. the continued existence due to God willing it to continue to exist.

**Rabbi:** Let's review Rambam (Book II, chap. xxv) and approach your question. Let's also identify the positions. The Torah teaches that God created everything. Nothing existed but God, and due to God's will, all matter and forms came into existence from nothingness (creation ex nihilo). Aristotle's view of the universe is not something created from nothing (ex nihilo) or created anew (de novo). The universe – as it is now – was eternally this way. Plato's universe is somewhat like Aristotle: matter always existed (it was not created), but unlike Aristotle, God fashioned that matter from its chaotic state into refined substances and forms. "Unlike the creation by the God of medieval theologians, Plato's Demiurge does not create ex nihilo, but rather orders the cosmos out of chaotic elemental matter, imitating the eternal Forms. Plato takes the four elements, fire, air, water, and earth (which Plato proclaims to be composed of various aggregates of triangles), making various compounds of these into what he calls the Body of the Universe." (<http://www.iep.utm.edu/plato/#SH7e>) Now let's address your questions...

**Francesca:** What Rambam seems to be saying is that if we do accept the eternity of the universe as Aristotle views it, then we would be accepting a position that would result in conflicts with the fundamentals of our religion?

**Rabbi:** Yes, the conflict is with the Torah's account of Creation from nothingness. And in Aristotle's universe - unchanging and uncontrolled by God - miracles are impossible. This too contradicts Torah's numerous accounts of miracles.

**Francesca:** He goes on to say that because neither position is proved one way or the other, there is no convincing reason to consider the argument for the eternity of the universe unless it's actually proven. The Rambam seems confident that this is one of those questions that Aristotle's position will not be able to penetrate conclusively.

**Rabbi:** Yes. Rambam says that Aristotle based his position on an argument alone, without proof. Thus, there is no reason to reject the literal account of Genesis; that Creation was made from nothing, certainly if arguments can equally support Creation. But you see Rambam's honesty, as he says if Aristotle had proof for an eternal universe, we would reject the Torah's literal interpretation. Here, Rambam teaches a fundamental: we never reject our minds, regardless of what we read, and regardless of where we read it. Once a proof exists for any idea, we must follow that proof, and reinterpret all that conflicts with it. This is unlike people today who will reject their minds, if some book or Rabbi makes a claim, regardless of how absurd the claim might be.

**Francesca:** I'm wondering if this is like the question we talked about in Koheles where certain people ask what will happen to us when we die. We wouldn't know except what God tells us in the Torah because our framework of being "alive" puts limits on what we can understand about death.

**Rabbi:** If you mean to equate areas that are outside of our intellectual reach due to the impossibility to observe, then yes. We cannot observe the moment of Creation, nor the afterlife. ■



## News

Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim

# Torah Shines Bright in Phoenix

*Rabbis and the Senator turn out to honor Torah*

**'We must be concerned to follow God's Torah, not what the world thinks of us.'**

*Rabbi Mann commenting on the spies and Israel's values*



Mrs. Mann, Rabbi Mann and Senator McCain



Farley Weiss, Sen. McCain and Rabbi Reuven Mann

Earlier this month, Rabbi Reuven Mann was welcomed by a warm audience comprised of his new congregation, a number of prominent Rabbis...and Senator McCain, upon his Installation as Rabbi of the Young Israel of Phoenix.

President Farley Weiss presented the senator with the Defender of Israel award for his enduring and unwavering dedication to Israel. "It was a memorable dinner," Weiss said, "Sen. McCain made time on the night of his daughter's graduation to come and speak to us, and speak movingly about Israel. The audience appreciated McCain's comments "defending Israel's right to seize the Turkish ship (en route to Gaza), telling us Jerusalem is the united capital of Israel and his outspoken defense of and support for Israel." McCain said that the Israeli raid of the flotilla headed to Gaza was "a lawful act of self-defense," and he noted that the flotilla's organizers "were not interested in bringing supplies. They were interested in causing an international confrontation, and they succeeded in doing so."

Rabbi Mann is an internationally known lecturer and one of the founders of Yeshiva B'nei Torah and the founder and dean of the Masoret Institute of Advanced Jewish Studies for Women, both in New York. "We've never had a Rabbi of his stature move to Phoenix," Weiss said of Rabbi Mann, "at least in Orthodox circles. He really impressed people."

Rabbi Saul Zucker – director of the OU's day school department – formally installed Rabbi Mann at the dinner with words of praise for our teacher of over 30 years. Also in attendance was Rabbi Pinchas Rosenthal – executive director of Manhattan Jewish Experience, as well as other Rabbis.

I deeply enjoyed being hosted by the Rabbi and his wife Linda over the past week in Phoenix, and felt right at home in the community. Rabbi Mann gave numerous lectures, and I will share one of his lessons. He mentioned the Miraglim – the spies – who returned with a negative report of the land of Israel. He cited their words "we were as grasshoppers in our eyes, and also in the eyes of the land's inhabitants". Rabbi Mann taught that the spies' concern of how they looked in the eyes of other nations is the same flaw to which Israel today falls prey. Handling the flotilla incident in an unarmed manner to appease world opinion is not how to deal with a potential threat. A tactical team must ensure they are in full control. If this demands heavy weapons, no compromise should be made that risks the mission, or the team. "We must be concerned to follow God's Torah, not what the world thinks of us."

Mesora wishes the Rabbi and his wife much success spreading the beauty of Torah and Ahavas Hashem within the Phoenix community and elsewhere, as the Young Israel of Phoenix streams the Rabbi's Tuesday night classes over the internet. (See [www.YIPhoenix.org](http://www.YIPhoenix.org))

As a student of Rabbi Mann, I can assure the Phoenix Jewish community that they can expect to be enlightened by a steady stream of novel and captivating insights, his passionate sermons, and his worldly knowledge. Mrs. Mann has one of the warmest hearts and has already hosted many guests since they have arrived a few months ago.

Together, Rabbi and Mrs. Mann make Phoenix a most tempting Jewish community for couples and families. ■





# Kabbala & Dishonesty

Anonymous

**Mekubal:** Over on Bad4's blog(1), I was presented with an argument that certain aspects of Kabbalah are dangerously close to (or possibly even) Avoda Zara. I was presented with the work "Tohar Hayihud"(2) by an anonymous Torah Scholar, which essentially makes the claim that Kabbalah, on account of things such as the Sephirot, does not hold to the belief of an absolute unity. Let me start by saying that I respect that Scholar's research, and his familiarity with sources. It was quite an interesting read. Unlike some other commentators, I don't believe that anything the author said was Kefira or out of the bounds of authentic Orthodox Judaism in any way. However, I do think that he made two major errors.

First, he presented the position of the "Rishonim" as being overly monolithic, as if the Ramban was some sort of oddity in the world of Torah Judaism at the time, neglecting the fact that a good number of other Rishonim were also heavily involved with Kabbalah, he overlooked personalities such as the Raavad, Rabbeinu Yona, the Rosh and the Tur, Yosef Giktalia, Shimon D'Min'Acco to name but a few. Also in this vein he states that the view of the faith as proposed by the Rambam was essentially a continuation of previous monolithic system, which, quite frankly is not true, as this article from Hashkafa Circle(3) will clearly demonstrate.

Second major mistake, he presents an inaccurate view of what Kabbalists believe. He seems to state that Kabbalists actually view things such as the Sefirot as being existent. Which is not the case, as I have already done one post on. However to really firm this up I offer you a piece of the Eitz Haim(daf 14c):

*"Therefore it is an apparent matter that there is body and no resemblance of a body, G-d forbid. All of these descriptions and images it is not that they actually are like this, God forbid. Therefore they are to soothe the ear in order that the person will be able to understand lofty and spiritual things will be perceived and registered in the intellect of mortals, thus permission has been given to speak in the manner of descriptions and images... Even the verses of the Torah itself answer and speak in this manner such as when the pasuk says, 'the eyes of HaShem wonder in all the earth'..."*

Just as we are no more supposed to actually think that HaShem has hands, feet, eyes, ears,

or nose, despite them being referenced in the Torah, same with the Sephirot and such things spoken about in Kabbalah. They are simply constructs to help us understand. In reading the writings of the Ari (more accurately Haim Vital's transcription of the Ari's teachings) it is important to understand that they were not given over to beginners. Most of the Ari's students had giluy Eliyahu HaNavi before they started learning with the Ari. Thus what the Ari gave only a single paragraph here and there to, others have written substantial works on. Two that are considered absolutely foundational for the study of Kabbalah are Shomer Enumina (HaKadmon) and Kise Eliyahu. These two works spend an incredible amount of space explaining how none of these things about which we talk truly exist, they simply are constructs to help conversation.

Are there people who call themselves mekubalim who in their arrogance have thought that they could bypass these works, and skip right into the meat of things? Yes absolutely, and yes they are completely off about the unity of HaShem. Hey, I know whole Yeshivot that follow this heresy. However there are crazies in every sect of Judaism, we need not name names or point fingers. Just as it would be wrong to reject Litvakim or Hasidim because of the extremists and crazies that populate their midst, it would be wrong to reject Kabbalah simply because there are some who don't seem to be read what is written on the page, or think that they are above the commentaries of generations past.

**Reader - June 10:** The problem my friend is that you chose not to post my reply to your questions. I merely quoted from Rivash, Rabbeinu Nissim, Chazon Ish etc. If you chose to be selective in what you wish others to read, be honest with yourself and just say you are not interested in honest debate regarding the most fundamentals of Yahadus. That is fine, there are many people like yourself who wish to frame the debate in a way that they can just close their eyes and say it isn't so because to say it is so would force them to evaluate everything they thought correct before. This approach is as old as time, I was just hopeful that you would be honest to deal with the "facts" and not the emotions. I assume I was wrong.

You refused to publish my reply to your misquote of the Rivash (a Rishon by the way, and a Talmid of the Ran, not some wild eye

(continued on next page)

Maskil that you seem to accuse anyone who disagrees with you). The Rivash doesn't say that he didn't comment on the topic because he did not learn Kabbalah from an adept teacher. What he said was that you mustn't study it unless it is from a Chacham M'kubal (an accepted Chacham) and then he goes on, "vadayan ulay", and only then "maybe".

Do you mean to say that this is not a telling comment on his position? When the Rivash quotes his Rebbe the Ran, who told him privately that the Ramban Z"L forced himself too much to "believe in Kabbalah" ...is that not a telling comment?

When the Rivash quotes someone who says that the Christians believe in three (trinity) and the Mekuballim believe in ten (Sefirot) is that not a telling comment?

When the Rivash states that people tried to explain to him the concept of how to Daven using the Sefirot but they uncovered one Tefach and buried themselves in many Tefachim, is that not a telling comment?

You also refused to print by quote from the Tshuvos Chazon Ish, as he states that there is no concept of going after Rov (following the majority view) on issues of Hashkafah (philosophy), but only on issues of P'sak Halacha. You also refused to publish my response to your categorical and incorrect statement that there is no Shul/Kehilla in the world that Berich Shemei is not said. Wrong again. Minhag Ashkinaz as established by Hagon Hatzadik Maran Harav Shimshon Refael Hirsch ZTKV"L, who took it out of the Nusach HaTifilah (prayer text) and returned the Nusach to its original form. He also took all other Kabbalistic oriented prayers out including Kabollas Shabbos. But you won't print this because you want to leave the readers of your blog with the disinformation and dishonest comments that there are no such accepted K'hillos in Klal Yisrael and that you have thoroughly refuted all my arguments.

I would have expected more from someone that comes across as a Mivakesh Es HaEmes and a Talmid Chacham. Such are times that we live.

You want to change the topic and divert the essence of the debate by asking how can it be that so many Torah greats got it wrong. This is not the question at hand. The only question is if the concepts that you believe in are in accordance with the accepted Mesorah from Moshe M'Pi HaGivrah (from God's words) through the time of the Geonim and early Rishonim.

That is the only question. But to address your diversion I would say two things. Firstly, according to your position, you would need to explain how all the Geonim including Rav Saadia Gaon, Reishonim like Rambam, Rabbeini Avraham Ben HaRambam, Rabbeinu Meshulam, Ran, Rivash, Meiri, and Meili all got it wrong.

The second point that I would make is that I have to assume that such Torah giants like Ramban and his Talmidim who did subscribe to Kabbalah, must have had a way to resolve the many questions that you have posted, but these answers elude us. If we don't have them, we must resort to the approach of the many great Chachamim that I have already listed because without these answers, your view of Yichud HaShem (God's Unity) is distorted at best and I don't want to think what it may be at worst.

### Reader's Addendum – June 17:

Since you chose to be dishonest and closed the posting on the Blog, I will post my reply here and end this conversation. You accuse me of dishonesty, and that the T'shuvah M'Ava says nothing of the kind, so please allow me to quote (T'M end of Siman alef, M'HaGaon R' Eliezer Pikkalish ZTKV"L) who says he was Meid that he saw "someone who wanted to make a Bracha on the Esrog Hamihudar of Rabbenu (The Noda B'Yehuda) and when he saw this Ploni say a Yehi Ratzon (L'Shaim Yihud) Koas v'rogaz, he became angry and said "Bketef Gadol" if anyone makes a Y'R he may not take my Esrog and make a Bracha on it" End quote... See also Sefer Minhag Yisrael Torah who brings this T'shuvah as well.

You are correct in one instance, I was writing from memory and I attributed a quote to the Noda B'Yehuda but It should have stated the T'Shuva M'Ahava 9Talmid Muvhak of the N"B), here is the quote:

### T'Shuva M'Ahava Siman 26

*"I swear by Hashem's Torah that in the Zohar there are many forgeries and destructive statements that have been added. One page of the Babylonian Talmud [containing] the discussions of Abaye and Rava is more holy than the entire Zohar -- the [authenticating] seal of R. Shimon ben Yohai is not affixed to them (i.e., to the words of the Zohar). Anyone with half a mind must admit this,*

*for a number of Tannaim and Amoraim are mentioned who lived many years after R. Shimon ben Yohai ... [This has been] explained by the Gaon (Rabbi Yaakov Emden), who declared that [unidentified] hands have been at work on it (i.e., the Zohar).*

And another quote:

### Noda B'Yehuda – Yora Deah, siman 93

*Concerning the formula "L'shaim Yihud" that has recently spread and has been printed in the siddurim ... in my view this is a sore evil in our generation. Generations prior to our time knew nothing of this formula, and did not say it. They toiled all their days in Torah and Mitzvos, and did everything according to the Torah and according to the Poskim whose words stem from the source of living waters, the sea of the Talmud. Of them it is said; "The integrity of the upright shall guide them" (Proverbs 11:3). It is they who produced fruit above; their piety is great above the heavens! But in this generation of ours ... each one says: "I am the seer! The gates of heaven have been opened to me! The world exists because of me"! ... I have much to say about this, but just as it is a Mitzva to say what will be accepted, so too is it a Mitzva to refrain from saying what will not be accepted. May Hashem have mercy upon us."*

You may disagree with my Mesora and point of view but I believe you owe me an apology and a public one at that. Malbim Chavero B'rabim (essentially calling me a liar) is a grave issue even on the internet. ■

- (1) <http://badforshidduchim.wordpress.com>
- (2) [www.mesora.org/ToharHayihud.pdf](http://www.mesora.org/ToharHayihud.pdf)
- (3) [www.hashkafacircle.com/journal/R3\\_DS\\_Taku.pdf](http://www.hashkafacircle.com/journal/R3_DS_Taku.pdf)



## **Shadchan Failure**

A man was recently asked by a Brooklyn shadduch group if he wore a beard or a hat... not if he followed the Shulchan Aruch, had an education, obtained smicha, adhered to Pirkei Avos, or under whom he studied.

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