

Our design is God's will. Failure to use intelligence violates that will and leads to a life of problems. Conviction must precede accepting any idea. Only then are our beliefs truly our merits.

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Weekly Parsha

Ekev

RABBI BERNIE FOX

Obedience to the Torah Protects Us from Sickness

And Hashem will remove from you all sickness. And all the terrible afflictions experienced by

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Weekly Parsha

V'achalta
V'savata:

the State of Satiation

RABBI DR. DARREL GINSBERG

One of the more popular American summer pastimes is the barbeque, bringing together friends and family, a common bond emerging from hot dogs and hamburgers (and for those vegans out there, the meat substitute). After this feast is over, the participants settle back in their easy chairs, their consumption complete. They are satiated, full, in a state of seviya—feeling full. It is the natural result of such a meal. And it is a concept that is actually a focus of this week's parsha.

Towards the end of Parshas Eikev, in the second section of kriyas shema, God explains that if we follow His commandments, we will be rewarded with plentiful rain and abundant food. God then tells us (Devarim 11:15):

"And I will provide grass in your field for your animals, and you will eat and be full. (v'achalta v'savata)."

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Fundamentals

God Demands We
THINK
for Ourselves

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

Reader: Shalom. This following question was triggered by your article, "Gentiles following Reason, and thus Torah". Here is the question: What is to be said about a Noahide who wishes to know Torah for enlightenment, and not to become a Torah Authority and/or teacher etc.?

Rabbi: A gentile may not study areas of Torah that he does not observe. However, if he wishes to observe laws in addition to his Noahide laws, Maimonides teaches he may observe, and obviously, he must study those

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(Ekev cont. from pg. 1)

Weekly Parsha

JewishTimes

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the Egyptians – that you knew – He will not place upon you. And He will direct them against your enemies. (Devarim 7:15)

In Parshat Ekev, Moshe continues his final address to Bnai Yisrael. He describes the rewards the people will experience if they are scrupulous in their observance of the mitzvot. Bnai Yisrael will be blessed among the nations. The nation will grow – its people will become numerous. The Land of Israel will be fertile and blessed with abundance. Moshe even assures the people that their animals will not be barren or sterile. Then, Moshe adds the above pasuk. Hashem will remove all sicknesses. Bnai Yisrael will not experience any of the afflictions visited upon the Egyptians. Instead, Bnai Yisrael's enemies will suffer these afflictions.

Our passage is difficult to understand. Moshe's reference to "the terrible afflictions experienced by the Egyptians" is apparently an allusion to the plagues that Hashem brought upon the Egyptians. Moshe is telling Bnai Yisrael that Hashem will not punish them with these plagues. Instead, He will bring these plagues upon their enemies. There are two problems with this statement.

First, Moshe is outlining the reward for observing the commandments. He is saying that one of the rewards is that Bnai Yisrael will not experience the terrible plagues brought upon the Egyptians. It is difficult to regard such an assurance as a reward. These plagues were punishments! A righteous nation should expect to be exempt from terrible punishment!

Second, Moshe has already told the nation that their adherence to the Torah will be rewarded with abundance and wealth. It seems obvious that if Hashem will reward the nation, He will not nullify the effect of these blessings by allow-

ing terrible afflictions to strike the nation! Assurance of the nation's protection from such calamity seems superfluous.

The commentaries offer a number of answers to these questions. Rabbaynu Ovadia Sforno suggests that the problem is partially based upon a misunderstanding of the pasuk. We have assumed that the afflictions to which the passage refers are the ten plagues. Sforno suggests that this is a misinterpretation. He explains that the afflictions to which the pasuk refers are epidemic diseases that struck the Egyptians.

When did the Egyptians experience these diseases? Sforno explains that at the Reed Sea the Egyptians who pursued Bnai Yisrael into the sea drowned as the waters collapsed upon them. Others died from terrible diseases with which Hashem afflicted them.

Based on this reinterpretation of afflictions to which our pasuk refers, Sforno answers our questions. Sforno observes that the passage is not merely assuring Bnai Yisrael that they will not experience these diseases. Viewed in its entirety, the passage is an assurance that the afflictions – the diseases – which Hashem will bring upon their enemies will not harm Bnai Yisrael. In other words, terrible, highly contagious

diseases will be brought upon Bnai Yisrael's enemies. Bnai Yisrael will be close by, but the epidemic will not affect Bnai Yisrael. They will be miraculously protected.[1]

Geshonides offers a completely different explanation of our pasuk. He contends that the passage can only be understood in the context of the popular religious beliefs of the time. The idolatrous cultures of that time had many beliefs that now seem strange to us. Modern humanity may dismiss their ideas as primitive and childish. However, Moshe addressed Bnai

(continued on next page)

Yisrael at a time in which the world was dominated by these ideas. He introduced a new perspective. He demanded that Bnai Yisrael abandon familiar, prevalent religious doctrines. We must understand his statements in this context.

Geshonides explains that the idolaters struggled with the existence of good and evil. How can a single deity preside over these two opposite forces – good and evil? Some idolaters responded that, in fact, there is no conflict because there are two deities. One deity rules over good, and the other has power over evil. The Torah rejected this response. The Torah introduced the concept of a single omnipotent deity with power and dominion over every element of the universe. Hashem only does good. However, we may not always appreciate the goodness of His acts.

What is the connection between this theological debate and Moshe's address? Gershonides explains that these blessings are more than a reward for observance of the Torah. These blessings are also evidence of Hashem's omnipotence. Through these blessings, Hashem would demonstrate His dominion over every aspect of the universe. We can now understand

Gershonides' answer to our questions. Moshe could not merely assure Bnai Yisrael that their obedience to the Torah would be rewarded with blessings of abundance. This might imply that the idolaters were correct - Hashem has the power to bestow good, but He does not have control over evil. Moshe added that Hashem will protect you from all evil. Not only does He control good; He also has complete control over evil. Moshe further emphasized this point by reminding Bnai Yisrael of the evidence they observed at the time of redemption. Hashem struck the Egyptians with terrible plagues. This demonstrates his dominion over evil.[2]

Hashem, your L-rd, is the ultimate Supreme Being and the highest possible Authority. He is the great, mighty, and awesome G-d, who does not give special consideration or take bribes. (Devarim 10:17)

Moshe describes Hashem as great, mighty, and awesome. This phrase was incorporated by the Sages into the opening benediction of the Amidah prayer. Although, through regularly reciting the Amidah, we are accustomed to referring to Hashem as "great, mighty, and awesome" we may not understand the specific meaning of these three terms and each one's unique message.

In his commentary on this passage, Rabbaynu Ovadia Sforno explains the meaning of each of these terms. The term "great" describes something as being different from, and superior to other entities or powers. Sforno explains that this refers to Hashem's unique existence. Every other thing requires a cause – external to itself – in order to exist. Even a simple rock only exists as a consequence of a complicated series of causes that can be traced back ultimately to the beginnings of the universe. The same dependence upon an external cause applies to every element in the universe. Hashem's existence is different from all other elements of the

universe. His existence is not dependent upon any external entity or force. He is the cause of His own existence or – more properly – it is His nature to exist.

The term "mighty" describes the power to influence others. In reference to Hashem this describes His influence over all creation. The universe came into existence as a consequence of His will. He created it. But not only is the universe's initial creation an expression of the Divine will but its continued existence is sustained by His will. As explained above, it is not the nature of a created thing to exist. It requires a cause to come into existence and its existence must be sustained through an external cause. The rock discussed in the previous example came into existence through a series of causes. We imagine that it is sustained by the principles and laws that govern the behavior of atomic and sub-atomic particles. But these principles and laws are also creations. What sustains these laws and principles? Ultimately, their sustained existence is an expression of Hashem's will.

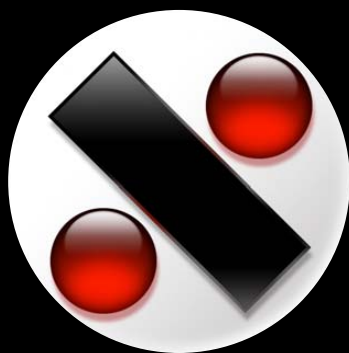
The term "awesome" describes the manner in which something or someone is perceived. Specifically, it refers to the feeling of awe inspired in the observer. This is a reference to Hashem's relationship with humankind. He rewards, punishes and exercises providence. This relationship results in our fear of Hashem.[3]

In summary, the first term "great" refers to the unique nature of Hashem's existence. The next term – "mighty" describes His relationship with the universe. The final term – "awesome" – describes our response or cognizance of these first two terms. When we encounter Hashem as a unique existence, who exercises complete dominion over all other aspects of the universe we are overcome with a sense of awe. ■

[1] Rabbaynu Ovadia Sforno, Commentary on Sefer Devarim 7:15.

[2] Rabbaynu Levi ben Gershon (Ralbag/Gershonides), Commentary on the Torah, p 414.

[3] Rabbaynu Ovadia Sforno, Commentary on Sefer Devarim, 10:17.



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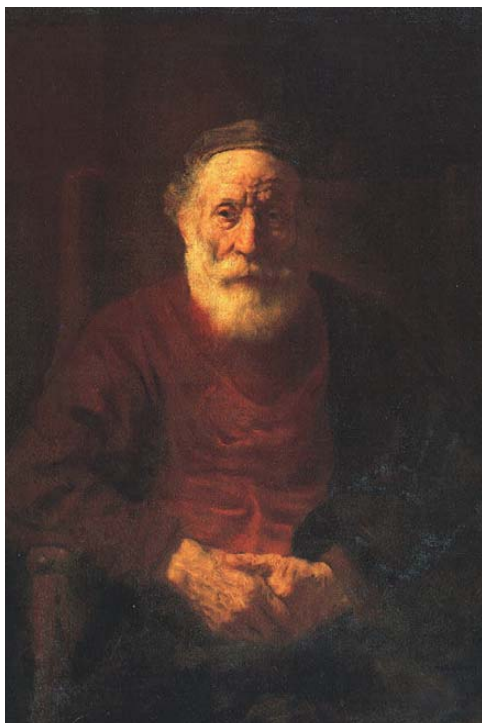
Fundamentals

laws so as to know their performance. This of course excludes holidays, as we have discussed. But in Torah areas of perfection and philosophy – not halacha – he may study fully.

Reader: Concerning the scriptures, do the Rabbis give "their" opinions or are they God-given revelations? I find it very disconcerting when different Rabbis argue. It makes me wonder if they're relying on their brain and opinions more than on getting a revelation from God, the Source. Is it assumed by the Jews that the comments of the Rabbis automatically become part of the Torah, without testing or verifying to see if the comments are of God? After all, Rabbis are/were human and prone to error like all of us. How does the whole thing work?

Rabbi: Rabbis use their intellects, just like any person. Be mindful that before they were Rabbis, they were like anyone, and nothing changes in his function or human design when one becomes a Rabbi. This title "Rabbi" refers to the permission and endorsement of another Rabbi, that he might rule on certain areas of Jewish law. And as each Rabbi uses his own imperfect intellect, he is subject to errors. This is why we see one Rabbi disputing another. Even Aaron disputed his brother Moses, regardless of the fact that Moses was his superior. Moses was wrong, and conceded that he erred.

In areas of halacha, we must follow the Rabbis, regardless of whether they truly arrive at the "absolute truth". For the system of halacha – Jewish law – relies on the Rabbis' human intelligence. This is God's law to us, "In accordance with the Torah they teach you, and according to the statutes they tell you, you shall do; do not veer from the matter that they tell you right or left." (Deut. 17:11) Thus, the Rabbis actually determine what is halacha. A Rabbi is not mandated to arrive at God's absolute truth in any area, for no man can do this. Not even Moses. Rashi comments on this verse, "Even of they tell you your right hand is your left... [you must accept them]." Rashi does not mean to say that you intellectually deny right from left. For the Torah commands to "stay far from falsehood". (Exod. 23:7) Rather, Rashi means that we must accept the Rabbis' "halachik definitions" and rulings. An example is, that although in reality, if an animal was slaughtered incorrectly and is non-kosher, if the presiding Rabbi at that slaughterhouse used his intellect to his best abilities and ruled this animal as kosher, we are allowed to eat it. Halacha follows the ruling of man, not "absolute reality". Yes, God knows that in fact, the animal was not properly slaughtered. But, "Torah is not in heaven". Meaning, Jewish law is determined by human intellect. Strange as it sounds, we are not



concerned if we do not match God's absolute knowledge. We accept that we cannot, and we accept God's command that we follow the Rabbis.

However, all this applies to law, not to philosophy.

As we discussed last week ("What You Must Know" July 23, 2010), Torah does not – and cannot – mandate that we "believe" what any person or Rabbi says, if in fact we do not believe it. God does not decree what is impossible. If one Rabbi says reincarnation is real, and another Rabbi rejects it – namely Saadia Gaon – both opinions cannot be true. A phenomenon is, or isn't a reality. It cannot exist and not exist simultaneously. To say "I agree with my Rabbi regarding reincarnation" is meaningless statement, if in fact, my mind does not truly grasp his words.

Worth repeating is what we said last week. Let us assume a friend tells us that inside a closed box, there rests an item called "X". Now, as I do not know what X is, does my agreement with him that X is inside, have any meaning? Is it of any worth at all, if I "agree"? Well, what do I mean that I "agree"? It cannot mean that I have ascertained proof, since the box is closed, and I have not witnessed what this X is. I can "trust" my friend isn't lying, but that trust offers me no knowledge whatsoever. I am still blind to what X is, regardless of my verbal statements.

Similarly, if my Rabbi were to tell me any idea, an idea that I have no way of proving, I am again no more informed if I say "I agree with you, since

you are my Rabbi". In halacha, yes: we must follow our Rabbis, as this is concerning how we "act", not how we think. But in philosophy, an area not subject to a psak or ruling, if even our Rabbi tells us an idea that we do not comprehend, my saying "I agree with you" is a meaningless statement. I cannot "agree" with that which my mind does not grasp. So if someone – even your Rabbi – says any idea about God, an idea I do not see clearly as true with my mind, any agreement or belief is worthless. Furthermore, I have not performed any mitzvah with my agreement, my agreement is also a lie, as I have not increased my knowledge; nor have I become any more devout to God. The converse is true: I have rejected reason and allowed myself to be fooled that I know something, which I do not. Torah is about truth. To say I agree with that, which I do not understand, is a lie.

I am glad you raised this issue. Today, Jewish communities are raising another generation of crippled-minded Jews. Schools, parents, and Rabbis teach something that God does not: "Rabbis are infallible". Certain Hassidic movements were founded on such foolishness, maintaining at their core the notion of the "Rebbe" – a man whose every word is absolute truth. A sinless saint. Of course this is diametrically opposed to the true Judaism where God is at the core, a Judaism that exposes Moses' sins and the flaws of all prophets and leaders.

Today, many Rabbis and their flock are to blame for sustaining such misleading views by repeating unproven stories of miracle-performing Rabbis. But a thinking Jew should ask himself this: "If I accept stories of a Rabbi's miracle without proof of witnesses, why should I not also believe Jesus' supposed miracles?" And he would be right to ask this, but Jews don't "go there". Jesus has a place in the Jew's mind that is absolutely false, and Rabbis are absolutely true. Herein, the Jew fails, for he/she does not define the matter. Jews are taught to be attached to "personalities", instead of thinking about the underlying "principles". Thus, the person Jesus is false, while the person of the Rebbe is always right. But this isn't Judaism – Rebbe's aren't flawless. We accept Judaism as it offers what all other religions do not: "proof" – of a Divine event. That being mass witnesses a Sinai.

Why are Rebbe's appealing? The Jew's human insecurities compel them to seek some rock, some impregnable refuge that offers comfort, success and the feeling of being "right", thereby releasing them from the burden of thinking for themselves. This was the precise corruption of the Gold Calf: "For this Moses, the man that took us up from Egypt..." (Exod. 32:1) Of course Moses is a

(continued on next page)

(Think continued from page 4)

Fundamentals

"man", but in this verse, God wished to underline their sin: the Jews' over-attachment to a human.

In truth, God told us that our means of accepting Him and Moses was through mass revelation. (Exod. 19:9) Thus, all purported events lacking such mass witnesses must be rejected, as is God's will, including all these lies of Rabbis who heal, offer success and perform miracles. The masses buy into these stories because it attracts the emotions...not because they have been presented with proof. Had a person's limb been severed, he or she would not run to a Rebbe to miraculously have him reattach it. When reality smacks a person in the face, they wake up. So we must ask why in other matters they do in fact presume Rebbe's perform miracles.

It is clear that "thinking" has become too difficult these days. The same emotion that generates laziness, also gravitates one towards fantasy stories.

To move forward and collectively strive to remedy this problem, let's isolate some issues and hopefully share truth – and not fables – with others.

Congregants don't oppose their Rebbe, for fear of being ostracized by others. Such silence enables the Rebbe to continue spreading his unproven notions. He thereby trains his congregants that proof – as in Revelation at Sinai – is not the only method to accept stories: any amazing story is acceptable, opening the door for unsuspecting Jewish youth to follow Jesus.

I am sure, many reading these last few sentences will say to yourselves, "How can I suggest that Rabbis today violate Torah principles? He's a great Rabbi, with many followers, and many books!" My response: this is the crippled mind to which I refer. You fail to think for yourselves, despite God's gift to you of an intellect. Had God desired we all parrot a Rabbi when it comes to philosophy, we would not need an intellect. And again as we said last week, our greatest teachers urged our independent thinking and not merely follow whatever every Rabbi says:

"If however, you possess intelligence and insight, and through these faculties your are capable of verifying the fundamentals of the religion and the foundations of the commandments which you have received from the sages in the name of the prophets, then it is your duty to use these faculties until you understand the subject so that you are certain of it – both by tradition and force of reasoning. If you disregard and neglect this duty, you fall short in the fulfillment of what you owe your Creator". (Duties of the Heart)

I am sure that many times, the Rebbe too believes these stories. Unfortunately, he too has been raised in a Christian culture of blind faith and belief, following his misguided Rebbes just like all others.

But he must not be viewed as beyond reproach, and he is not excused for his failure to seek the proof that God demands for all truths. He is your leader – he should be teaching truth, not fantasy. A concerned Jew must approach him, privately, requesting that he adhere to the Torah's formula of when to accept truth – only when mass witnesses exist in the story's context. We must insist he cease from claiming miraculous stories where mass witnesses were not present. If he follows God's Torah, he must confess his error. If he fails to uphold Torah, you and other paying members must remove him and commence a search for a truthful and intelligent leader. For if you allow him to remain, you encourage the spread of corrupt thinking in others, including your children, that allows any miraculous story to be accepted as truth, including Christianity.

So what are the lessons we must learn?

Lesson 1: Do not fear your peers.

Lesson 2: Think for yourself.

Lesson 3: Popularity and authorship do not translate as truth. Many popular people have corrupt notions, and when they write books, these same notions must still be corrupt. Therefore,

Lesson 5: Do not buy books written for children or adults that make claims of miracles occurring after the Torah and Prophets. Why? Because...

Lesson 6: We must follow the truths spoken by

Maimonides' son and King Solomon, that the Rabbis and Talmudic Aggadot (concerning "miracles") are not to be understood literally. These are not accounts found in Torah, where God performed miracles. As a wise Rabbi taught:

"To paraphrase Shmuel Hanagid(1), the value of Aggadah (allegory) is found only in the gems of wisdom one derives from it. If one derives nonsense, it has no value. Very few people are capable of 'diving into the deep water and coming up with pearls'. [Ramban metaphor] Other individuals have no business delving into Aggadah. They would do better refraining from trying to interpret that which is beyond them. "Bmufrosh mimcha al tidrosh". Such people cannot discern between something literal or metaphorical."

Lesson 7: Abandon the need for a "holy man" to remove your insecurities. Follow God and "Cast onto God your burden, and He will sustain you..." (Psalms 55:23)

Focus on, and pray to God. Cannot He do more than a human? ■

(1) See "Mavo HaTalmud" (Intro to the Talmud) found at the end of Tractate Brachos

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Weekly Parsha

RABBI REUVEN MANN



WHO HAS GOD CHOSEN?

One of the most basic doctrines of Judaism is that the Jews are the chosen people. We should not underestimate the significance of this idea for it is the cost of the animosity that Jews have experienced through the ages and that afflicts us to this very day. Religious envy is the root cause of anti-Semitism. It is not by accident that Islam and Christianity affirm that God gave the Torah to the Jewish people but at a certain point in time got upset with them and replaced them with the adherents of those religions.

The irony is that both Jews and gentiles have seriously misunderstood the reasons behind Hashem's selection of the Jews. Many Jews take it as a sign of Jewish superiority and feel proud that they are endowed with special spiritual qualities. At first glance this interpretation seems plausible. Why would God choose us to be His people if we were not somehow "better" than the rest of mankind? However, this week's parsha, Eikev, makes it clear that this is not the case. Moshe warns the Jews not to feel superior when Hashem drives out the inhabitants of Canaan for the Jews to inherit their land. Moshe says: "Do not say because of my righteousness does Hashem give me this land...It is not because of your righteousness or straightness of heart...because you are a stiff necked people." Moshe

then proceeds to review the major sins of the Jews which confirm his thesis that they are a stubborn people.

Moshe Rabbenu certainly did not subscribe to the notion of the superiority of the Jewish people. He pointed out our flaws and urged us to work on them. However, we must ask: if we are not that great then why, indeed, did Hashem choose us? The answer which also appears in this week's sedra should make us humble. We were selected to be the chosen people because of an "accident of birth." Moshe says: "only your forefathers did Hashem cherish to love them and He chose their offspring after them, yourselves, from among all the nations, as this day." The patriarchs and matriarchs who discovered the true idea of G-d and the appropriate way to serve Him had genuine merit and found favor with Hashem. He chose us only because we happen to be their descendents and are most likely to identify with these great personalities and emulate their unique religion and way of life. We must, therefore, renounce any suggestion of innate superiority. It is vital for us to acknowledge that we have flaws and a long way to go until we reach the level of our forefathers and become worthy of the special love that Hashem bestowed upon them.

Shabbat Shalom. ■

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Immediately after (ibid 16), God warns us:
"Look out for yourselves lest your heart be misled and you turn away and serve other gods and bow to them"

Rashi (ibid) notes the juxtaposition of these two verses:

"Since you will eat and be full, look out for yourselves, so that you are not insubordinate, for a man does not rebel against the Holy One, may He be blessed, except when satiated, as it is said, 'Lest you eat and become full (pen tochal v'savata), and your cattle and flocks multiply.' What is said afterward? 'You shall become arrogant and forget.'"

Rashi seems to be introducing a new concept – satiation brings someone to rebel against God. What type of causal relationship is this?

However, there is a more fundamental implication from Rashi's words. He is clearly explaining that the state of satiation is fraught with danger, leading to Bnai Yisrael turning away from God.

And yet...in the beginning of this same parsha, the Torah (ibid 8:10) tells us:

"You will eat and be full, and you will bless (v'achalta v'savata u'verachta) Hashem, your G-d, for the good land He has given you"

The Talmud explains (Berachot 21a) that this is the source of the obligation to recite birkas hamazon:

"Rab Judah said: Where do we find that the grace after meals (birkas hamazon) is ordained in the Torah? Because it says: And you will eat and be full, and you will bless"

The common deduction from this that it is the state of seviya that requires one to recite birkas hamazon. And if this is the case, it would seem the state of satiation, rather than bring one to idolatry, is an opportunity for a greater understanding of God. (It is important to note that within halacha, bread is the food that by definition brings about this result).

How do we resolve this contradiction?

Let's first take a broader look at the verses Rashi quotes in his interpretation. Moshe relays the following to Bnai Yisrael (ibid 8:11-14):

"Look out for yourself lest you forget Hashem, your God, to not guard His commandments, His laws, and His statutes that I am commanding you today. Lest you eat and be full, and build good houses and live [in them.] And your cattle and your sheep multiply, and silver and gold multiply for you, and everything you own multi-

plies. And your pride increases, and you forget Hashem, your God, Who took you out of the land of Egypt, from the house of slavery;"

There is a progression here that requires an explanation. The Torah tells us that one will "eat and be full," which leads to more houses, cattle, and treasures - culminating with the statement of "everything you own multiplies." It is at that point that the person turns away from God, the rebellion alluded to by Rashi.

How does this all happen from a few big meals?

Eating, as everyone knows, is one of the primary appetitive drives, whereby a person consumes to remove the physiological state of hunger. Yet there is a different type of eating experience, that which leads to satiation. This outcome is, in actuality, beyond fulfilling any such physiological need - it brings about a positive psychological state, the "feeling of being full," a perceived sensation of complete and utter satisfaction. This is the state that the Torah focuses on.

There are two possible results that emerge from being soveah. Normally, the physical world serves to assist man in his routine daily life; but to enter the state of satiation goes beyond the standard. When a person views the physical world benefiting him in this way, beyond simply fulfilling a requirement, a possible danger emerges. The nature of his dependency on this world for survival changes and the objective of the physical world becomes a means to serve his needs. It is there to make him happy, to create the sense of satisfaction. To view the physical world in such a manner leads man down the path the Torah warns us against. He looks to acquire more and more, trying to satisfy his endless needs and does so in line with his thinking that the world exists for his benefit. If the world is there to serve man's desires, man becomes all important. And the culmination of all this is the "rebellion" against God. It is man's outsized view of the self that leads to this result. It is more than a big meal; it is a distorted and self-serving attitude. That is not to say that being satiated directly results in this. It is more how one, over a period of time, reflects while in this state, and how he begins to direct his energies.

When the physical world serves mankind beyond that which is necessary, mankind judges himself as the epitome of greatness. Based on this, one might conclude to become satiated is inherently a problem. However, there is another approach that man turns to, with the guidance of the Torah. The Torah teaches us that the world we live in, and that which we benefit from, is not



there as an end in and of itself. Rather, the physical world serves as a means, a vehicle to help us in our understanding of God and perfection of the self. When this world is functioning beyond the "need" realm, shifting into the psychological satisfaction, a unique opportunity emerges. When someone can direct that state towards yediyas Hashem, he is utilizing the benefit of the physical world towards its true objective. This is what makes birkas hamazon so pivotal - it is more than the recognition of God as the source of all. It is the personification of man's proper relationship to the physical world. So he has the big meal – and when he is soveah, he recites birkas hamazon, turning to God.

We see from this a fascinating theme that is not isolated to the phenomenon of satiation. Throughout the Torah, we are taught not to repress or shun the physical world around us, but to enjoy it and take pleasure from it. On the other hand, the lure of the psychological pleasures of our surrounding world can ultimately lead mankind to reject God. God lays out for us a road to properly enjoy this world, and how to tie that enjoyment to the ultimate objective. After downing that last hot dog and reclining back in that chair, view the state of satiation not simply as a means of self satisfaction, but as an opportunity to engage in yediyas Hashem – knowledge of God. ■



40 DAYS & NIGHTS

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

“And the glory of God dwelt on Mt. Sinai, and the cloud covered it six days, and He called unto Moses on the seventh day from the cloud. And the appearance of the glory of God was like a devouring fire at the summit of the mountain in the eyes of the Children of Israel. And Moses came in the midst of the cloud, and he ascended the mountain, and it was that Moses was in the mountain 40 days and 40 nights.” [1]

What is the importance of Moses’ 40-day stay on Sinai? In Deuteronomy, Moses tells the Jews that he fasted during these first 40 days on Sinai. (The omission here is of interest) Ibn Ezra states that Moses’ fast of 40 days and 40 nights is a “great, unprecedented wonder”. [2] But we must learn whether this fasting was Moses’ idea, God’s command...or did it just happen? And what would be lost, had Moses not fasted? He would still have received the Torah, as it says “Ascend the mountain to Me and remain there and I will give you the Tablets of stone, and the Torah and the Mitzvah which I have written to

teach them” [3]. What difference would it make, had Moses received the Tablets, without fasting?

Let us review the order of Moses’ ascensions on Sinai. Moses first received and wrote the Torah, commencing with Genesis and concluding with his present-day, the event of Revelation on Sinai located in Parsha Yisro. This means that all of the Torah subsequent to Sinai (Parshas Yisro) was not yet given to Moses at Sinai. [4] Moses then descends Sinai and informs the Jews of this Torah, which they accept. On the 7th of Sivan, Moses ascends Sinai for his first of three 40-day periods on the mountain, to receive the first Tablets. On his last day – 17th of Tammuz – Moses learns of the Jews sinning with the Golden Calf. He remains there on the mountain that last day, prays for the Jews not to be destroyed, and receives a favorable reply from God [5]. But keep in mind that during these 40 days until the Jews sinned, Moses’ abstinence from food was not on account of any sin, since no sin was revealed to him until day 40 [6]. On this 40th day – the 17th of Tammuz – Moses

descends, breaks the first set of Tablets, punishes the wicked Jews, and ascends to pray for the Jews. He prays for 40 days and night, until the 29th of Av: although God rescinded His initial decree to kill the nation, the Jews still bore the sin [7] of the Golden Calf which Moses wished to remove during this second 40-day period. At God’s command to receive a replacement set of Tablets, Moses descends and quarries a new set of sapphire Tablets on which God will inscribe the original 10 Commandments. He then ascends for a final 40-day period dwelling on the mountain, and received complete atonement for the Jews on Yom Kippur, forty days after the 29th of Av. (Rashi)

When describing the actual events at Sinai in Exodus, the Torah omits any mention of Moses’ abstinence from food or drink, “...and it was that Moses was in the mountain 40 days and 40 nights.” Not a word of his abstinence. Why then does Moses tell the Jews about his fasting when he rebukes the Jews in Deuteronomy? The Torah is silent about his fast until this point:

“And in Horeb you angered God, and God was angered with you to destroy you. When I ascended the mountain, to receive the Tablets of stone, the Tablets of the Treaty which God forged with you; and I dwelled on the mountain 40 days and 40 nights; bread I did not eat, and water I did not drink.” [8]

During those first 40 days to receive the first Tablets, the Jews had not yet sinned. Why then did Moses include this ascent in his rebuke? Additionally, why now does he mention his abstinence from food?

Moses continues his rebuke, “And I beseeched God like at first; 40 days and 40 nights, bread I did not eat and water I did not drink.” [9] Here, Moses refers to his second ascent upon Sinai to obtain forgiveness for the Jews’ sin. But we wonder, why did Moses

commence with the rebuke “And I beseeched God like at first”? What does Moses mean by the words “like at first”? We are surprised to read this, since we already proved that Moses’ first ascent was not for any sin of the Jews, but to receive the original Tablets at God’s command. This ascent predated the Golden Calf. So what is Moses’ equation between his second ascent to gain forgiveness, and his first ascent? We are forced to say that Moses’ abstinence during his first 40 days is somehow akin to his subsequent ascension and prayer for another 40 days after the Jews sinned, where he again did not require any nourishment. What is the equation?

Abstinence: Moses’ Lesson

What was Moses responding to with his second ascension on Sinai? The answer: the Golden Calf, the Jews’ sin of idolatry. What is this sin?

Idolatry is man’s attempt to gain goodness in his life, but does so through the misconception that animals, man, inanimate, or imaginary objects possess powers and can offer goodness. Humans are indeed dependent beings: we require food, clothing and shelter and have a myriad of insecurities. We sometimes become feeble, unsure that we can provide for ourselves, also in doubt about our future. Therefore, we succumb to hearsay regarding “powers” that can guarantee our needs. We create idols; seek out palm readers, even those as great as King Saul sought to resolve insecurities by inquiring of the dead [10]. Unless we arm ourselves with truths, we will be no different. Today’s Parshas Shoftim clearly prohibits all such false practices, as Ibn Ezra says, “the Torah prohibits that which is false.” [11]

This very need expressed in idolatry, is precisely what Moses emphasized, and desired to address. Moses teaches that we can obtain not only our needs, but so

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Weekly Parsha

much more...but only with adherence to God. He tells the Jews that God "did one better" by removing any of his human needs. Idolatry attempts to secure the needs one has according to his natural disposition, that of an organism in need of food, clothing and shelter. And these, an idol cannot accomplish. In stark contrast, not only can God deliver those needs, but also, He can sustain man without needing to satisfy these natures...God can override nature. This is why Moses tells the Jews that he did not eat or drink, even during his first ascent, which had nothing to do with the Jews' sin. During that first stay on Sinai, Moses attachment to God and His system procured such Divine Providence, that his normal needs were obviated. Revealing this great wonder to the Jews, Moses wished to awaken the sinful Jews to the exact foolishness of their sin. As an educator, Moses decided to unveil the Jews' underlying notions that led to their sin: "You sought protection from gold which is inanimate, while God

completely overrode my very needs. In this manner, Moses wished the Jews might realize their falsehoods, and abandon them. In this manner, they can truly repent. Informing the Jews that God removed his need to eat, Moses contrasted their idolatrous motivations, which never succeeded, to God's manifest proof of His complete control over all. This should make an impression on those seeking security, that it could only come from God.

Earlier in Deuteronomy[12] Moses states, "And He afflicted you and hungered you and fed you the Manna that you and your forefathers did not know, in order to make known that not on bread alone does man live, but on all that comes forth from God's mouth does man live. Your clothing did not become worn from upon you, and your feet did not swell these forty years." Again, Moses teaches the Jews how God sustained them with a miraculous food, how their clothing miraculously never wore, nor did they show physical symp-

toms normally met with those who traveled for so long.

Moses' message is not that we should abandon natural law and rely on nature, for Moses himself would not do so. Moses' entire life was spent educating the Jews about a land that would provide sustenance, for the very reason that we must live in accord with our natural need for sustenance. So what was Moses' goal in mentioning all God's miracles, and his endurance with no food for 40 days and nights?

Moses' lesson is that while we witness natural law to be constant, we must have greater conviction in He who created and guides this law. If God says that Torah adherence will earn us all our needs, we must not abandon Torah because we feel this loss of work hours will lessen our income. We don't know how God will assure our needs are met, and truthfully, we don't need to know, nor can we know. God created this universe...do you know 'how' He did so? No man ever did. God's knowledge and

controls are unknowable, but His words are clear: He will provide, if we live the life He commands, for our own good. So if we are convinced that God exists, and that He does in fact control all, and that He promises to care for our needs if we follow Him, then other considerations must not take priority in our minds. Creating Golden Calves we assume will protect us, is an extreme illustration of the same falsehoods we harbor today: we work tirelessly, assuming everything we earn, is a result only of how much we work. God is not in our equations, just as God was not in the equation when the Jews created the Calf.

God addresses this insecurity in Malachi[13], where He says that we may test Him when giving our charity: "...and test Me please with this, says the Master of Hosts, (see) if I do not open up the storehouses of heaven, and empty out (for you) a blessing until you have more than enough". God is guaranteeing that

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by giving tzedaka, we assure for ourselves financial security, and not an average income, but "until we have more than enough". Our normal disposition is that when we part with money, we have less. But God teaches the opposite.

So what will you follow: human thinking based on natural law, or God, who created and controls those very laws?

Moses had no plan to abstain from natural law while on Mount Sinai. It happened that while there, engaged in prophecy and Torah study, God suspended natural law so that Moses endured for 40 days and 40 nights, awake, and not eating. Moses' attachment to Torah earned him God's providence. Our attachment to Torah will earn us the same. ■

[1] Exod. 24:16-18

[2] Exod. 24:18

[3] Exod. 24:12

[4] Rashi, Exod. 24:4,7. This is reasonable, since all subsequent events recorded in our Torah from Yisro through Deuteronomy had not yet transpired. And even if God had included these future events comprising the Jews' future sins in this version of the Torah, free will would be affected, which violates God's will.

[5] Exod. 32:14

[6] Deut. 9:11

[7] Deut. 9:18 states that Moses sought to remove the Jews' "sin", since he already obtained pardon from their destruction, as seen in Exodus 32:14.

[8] Deut. 9:8,9

[9] Deut. 9:18

[10] Samuel I, 28:7-19

[11] Lev. 19:31

[12] Deut. 8:3,4

[13] Malachi 3:10



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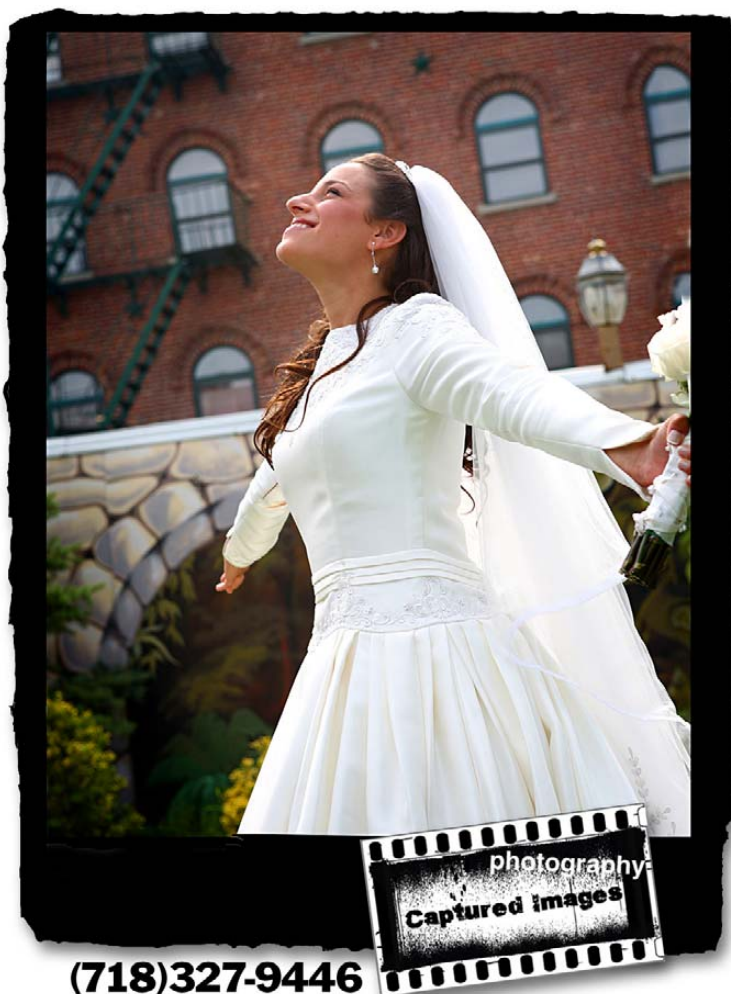
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