



JewishTimes

SPECIAL ISSUE

Mysticism

A Jewish Concept, or Not Based in Reality?

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The Influence of Our Names and Monopolies on Truth

This week, a Rabbi endorsed the view that our names determine our "fate." He actually committed theft by selling his name readings, claiming to give insight into a person based on his name alone...for a price.

Let's think: if fate were a reality, repentance and good deeds would be useless, since a force not in our control called "fate" would be steering our

lives; not us. But as free will has been demonstrated since man walked the Earth, we reject the notion of fate. God too rejects fate, as He says we have the "choice" to live by Torah or not. Now, if there were in fact such "forces" that compel our fate, while God says otherwise, that we can choose...this makes God out to be a liar and an unjust ruler. Clearly, this position violates Torah's most primary fundamentals.

This Rabbi quoted the Vilna Gaon and rejected Maimonides to support the notion that our names possess some power. But name dropping — even of a great intellect — without reasoning and proof, in no way

validates any notion. King Solomon taught under Divine inspiration, "For man is not righteous in the land who does good and does not sin (Ecclesiastes 7:20)." Even Moses sinned. So no man or woman has a monopoly on truth. Therefore, quoting alone, even someone as great as the Vilna Gaon, does not validate the notion. The Rabbi offered no reason for his siding with the Vilna Gaon, leaving us clueless as to why he rejected Maimonides.

How then do we determine truth, or "reality?"

Unless some notion is proven to be fact, it does the believer

no good — and usually harm — to accept such fantasy as reality. Only that which has been experienced is called reality. Thus, as the Rabbi's support of gilgul, reincarnation, and the power of names both remain without proof, it is worthless to say "I accept this as truth."

The Creator granted man five senses for the precise purpose of relying on them to determine truth from falsehood. If we do not witness or detect a phenomenon, we must not accept it. This is God's will. For if we are to accept as real any matter we have not witnessed, we must then accept any prophet and any religious claim throughout time, including Jesus, Mohammed, et al. Yet, God instructs us not to accept any of them (Deut. 13:4). We witnessed Revelation at Sinai; we know Judaism to be true. God orchestrated Revelation precisely to offer man proof of the senses. It is then unreasonable to suggest that God wishes we accept matters like mysticism that are bereft of proof.

God requires we apply reason and proof to all areas of life. By suddenly abandoning our senses and reasoning, and accepting reincarnation and name influence, we abandon God's will. The Torah openly records God's admonition of Cain, warning him that "sin crouches at the door," but that repentance is equally available. Thus, Cain's name had nothing to do with his decisions, as God stated. This opinion of name influence, is accepted only by those ignorant of the Torah.

Furthermore, by accepting this view that our names determine our lives, we reject God's Torah fundamental of

"free will." We know we have free will, so we know this view is false.

The only influence a name has upon its bearer is through identification. If I am named Moses, I might (and I stress "might") attempt to live up to his great image. But other than this, there is no basis for suggesting a name possesses any abilities. In fact, a name is merely an idea, not a physical force like fire, which has physical properties. In contrast, names are in no manner related to the physical world, or mankind. Similarly, the Talmud (Sabbath 156a) teaches that a person might identify with the events that occurred during the Six days of Creation: "One born on Sunday will be either totally good, or totally evil." Rashi states that since Sunday is the "lead" day of the week, one who is born on Sunday will also be a leader, in either the good life, or the evil life. This is explained by simple identification; the person views his birth day with great significance. He feels, "There must be reason why I was born on Sunday." This creates a self-fulfilling prophecy. There is no need to concoct fantasies of "powers" residing in days, or powers within a name.

Reviewing the Matriarch's lives, we notice Rachel and Leah naming the Twelve Tribes. Leah names a few of her children after her hopes that Jacob would love her. Rachel names Joseph after her wish that God will yet add (yosef) to her lot another son. These women far surpass anyone today. Yet, they attributed no "mystical" meaning to the naming of children, as this Rabbi suggests.

It is worthwhile to reiterate an idea mentioned above. As the Torah — God's "complete" blueprint for life — has no mention of mysticism, including the power of names and all other such notions, we must make a conclusion. That conclusion is that God's omission teaches that they are not true. Would our fair and just God leave mankind in the dark about "powers," had they been real, and could improve our lives? Would God record the stories of the Patriarch's and Matriarch's difficult times, and omit their use of sorcery and mysticism, had they truly acted this way? We must appreciate that Torah is a system of inclusion, and "exclusion." What is excluded is done so, since it is false. God tells us how Jacob prepared himself when his twin Esav approached, threatening his life, and the lives of all with him. Jacob prayed, he prepared a bribe, and he prepared for battle. But he did not engage in mysticism. Neither did any other Patriarch or Prophet. The reason is because these prophets knew mysticism was not real.

Stating that the Vilna Gaon did not agree with Maimonides does not mean the Vilna Gaon is correct. The burden of proof remains on such individuals to prove their theories, or to abandon them. But to accept something as true without proof means the adherent of such view is not following his mind. It would be wise to say "I have no evidence that such and such is true." But to say "It's true, but I have no proof" is a confession that one has abandoned his reasoning. Of such a person, King Solomon said, "A fool believes everything he hears (Proverbs 14:15)." ■

Dialogue with a Mystic

Mystic: Why don't you believe in mysticism just like you believe in rational matters?

Rabbi: What is mysticism?

Mystic: The belief in forces and powers we don't know about.

Rabbi: So you want me to accept something you cannot prove?

Mystic: Maybe there are forces out there other than natural law.

Rabbi: Why do you accept natural law?

Mystic: Because I witness it.

Rabbi: But you don't witness mystical matters?

Mystic: No.

Rabbi: Yet, you believe in them?

Mystic: Yes.

Rabbi: Your position is this: something can be real, although never witnessed. Meaning, our subjective views are not conclusive. This alone is agreeable. However, do you actually live this way, in the same manner you wish me to live, to incorporate the belief in powers into my daily decisions? If I told you there are mystical forces that will make money fall from your ceiling, will you quit your job? Will you walk in traffic blindfolded if I told you there are mystical forces that will protect you?

Mystic: No.

Rabbi: Why not?

Mystic: Maybe the forces won't protect me when I need them to, but maybe they still exist.

Rabbi: You are saying these imagined forces play no role at all in your daily life?

Mystic: Correct.

Rabbi: So you live exactly as I do.

Mystic: No, I believe these forces exist.

Rabbi: Let me tell you something..."zather" exists.

Mystic: What?

Rabbi: "Zather" exists!

Mystic: What is zather?

Rabbi: I don't know.

Mystic: Then why did you say it exists?

Rabbi: You mean it's meaningless to say this, since I don't know what it is?

Mystic: Yes.

Rabbi: Your statement that mysticism exists is equally meaningless. ■

Astrology

Some time ago my brother Nissim wrote me regarding the Torah's view of astrology. We discussed the matter, and after reviewing many sources, I wish to share our findings, and my thoughts.

"I know that you may search and find sayings of some individual sages in the Talmud and Midrashim whose words appear to maintain that at the moment of a man's birth, the stars will cause such and such to happen to him. Do not regard this as a difficulty, for it is not fitting for a man to abandon the prevailing law and raise once again the counterarguments and replies (that preceded its enactment). Similarly it is not proper to abandon matters of reason that have already been verified by proofs, shake loose of them, and depend on the words of a single one of the sages from whom possibly the matter was

hidden." –Maimonides, "Letter to the Community of Marseille"

Maimonides teaches that reason must be the ultimate guide of our thoughts and actions. Once we know something to be true based on reason and proof, any opposition, even from the Sages, should be of no consequence. Maimonides was guided by his understanding of the universe; there are fixed laws of nature and Divine providence, and our acceptance of theories and truths have but a single arbiter: "proof". Once we see a proof for something, all other views are of no regard, for "proof" means that man has uncovered conclusive reasoning for how the universe operates. And any view opposing that which has been demonstrated, must be false.

Certainly, the method displayed by many individuals defending a view simply because a Sage or Rabbi stated it, is

self-contradictory, as seen in this example: Ruben accepts Rabbi "A" on a certain, philosophical issue. Then, Ruben reads that Rabbi "B" opposes Rabbi "A". What shall Ruben do? He already claimed support for Rabbi "A", based on his reputation. Now when he learns that Rabbi "B" opposed it, how does Ruben decide which is truth? For two opposing views cannot both be correct: either one is correct and one is wrong, or, both are wrong. But both cannot be correct if they oppose each other. Relying on reputation alone, Ruben is at a stalemate.

Many times, it is confidence alone that people lack – not proofs – and therefore they cannot say, "I think Rabbi "B" is more sensible. Sometimes this stems from false humility, and sometimes, from the lack of independent thought, and their inability to cleave to truth, over reputations. Maimonides teaches that this path cannot be

followed, for the clear reason proved in Ruben's stalemate. Man must use reason to determine truth: this is precisely why God granted "each" of us intelligence. We are not to simply "follow the leader".

Now, when approaching the area of astrology, we are faced with this dilemma: great reputations oppose each other. Do we follow Maimonides, or Ramban and the Ramchal? Actually, this is not how a thinker frames his question, for a true thinker seeking truth cares little about reputations, and is concerned only for what is reasonable. The thinker is not deciding between Ramban and Maimonides, but he divorces the theories from the personalities, judging theories on their own merit. We are certain that our Baalei HaMesora – Masters of the Oral law – always followed Maimonides' principle of following truth over any other consideration:

"It is not proper for a man to accept as trustworthy anything other than one of these three things: 1) clear proof deriving from man's reasoning; 2) what is perceived through one of the five senses; 3) what is received from the prophets or from the righteous. Every reasonable man ought to distinguish in his mind and thought all the things that he accepts as trustworthy, and say: "This I accept as trustworthy because of tradition, and this because of sense-perception, and this on grounds of reason." Anyone who accepts as trustworthy anything that is not of these three species, of him it is said: "The simple believes everything" (Prov. 14:15). –Maimonides, "Letter to the Community of Marseille"

Maimonides teaches that our acceptance of truths must be

limited to one of these three methods; reason, sense perception, or Torah tradition. Based on the third, let us review some Torah verses addressing astrology. We will then answer other quotes, which "seem" to contradict our findings – not because we need to, but because we can.

Torah Refutations

In Parsha Miketz (Gen.41:8) Pharaoh has two dreams: in one, seven lean cows swallow seven healthy cows, and in the second, seven lean ears of corn swallow seven healthy ears. In both dreams, no display of ingestion could be discerned. Pharaoh was deeply bothered by his dreams, but "he could find no interpreter (ibid)."

Typically, Pharaoh would accept his astrologers' theories. However, in this case, as Pharaoh was distraught, his regular acceptance of astrological theories did not suffice to settle his mind. Here, when he was personally involved, he dismissed the baseless quality of his astrologers' explanations. This teaches that there were no incontrovertible proofs in the words of his astrologers.

On verse 41:8, Rashi states that his Egyptian astrologers suggested the dreams to mean that Pharaoh will bear seven daughters, and that he will bury seven daughters. However, this never occurred. We learn that these astrologers were lying, and had no knowledge based on their astrology. Why did they speak up when they knew they were lying about foreknowledge? The answer is because they desired to retain their posts as Pharaoh's ministers: honor and fame is a great lure. Surely, his astrologers

were consulted in the past, and as back then, they would suggest meanings, otherwise, they had no use to Pharaoh. Why would Pharaoh retain them? Because they could not be proven wrong; they might claim, "You will yet have those daughters and you will yet bury them." The astrologers were wise enough not to paint themselves into a corner. Pharaoh may have retained their posts for the additional reason that he needed to consult with mystics, and perhaps, sometimes, these astrologers guessed correctly. They clearly received their position based on some performance...be their prior successes based on mere intuition, or coincidence. But foreknowledge is clearly dismissed, as seen in this example of the seven daughters theory.

Why did Pharaoh accept Joseph's dream interpretations? It appears from Joseph's method of explanation, that at a certain point even before completing his interpretation, Joseph was convinced he imbued Pharaoh with the true explanation. At that point midstream, Joseph exclaims, "This is the thing that I told Pharaoh: what God plans to do, He has shown to Pharaoh." (Exod. 41:28) Joseph could have only said this, if he was certain that he already proved the true meaning, and that this was Divine. Thus, he tells Pharaoh, in other words, "Do you now see? This proves your dreams are divine!"

With the words, "The dreams of Pharaoh are one" – which Joseph repeats – Joseph was convinced in his interpretation, and that he also proved to Pharaoh his interpretation was correct. Telling Pharaoh twice, "The dreams of Pharaoh are one", Joseph deviated from the arbitrary methods of the

astrologers, focusing on a repeating “design” in the dream, not merely offering an alternative explanation of the “content”. With his explanation of the repeating “design” feature, Joseph distinguished the uniqueness of his interpretation, from that of the astrologers’. Thereby, Pharaoh was convinced that Joseph was correct. Ibn Ezra (41:32) states that the dreams’ duplication – in a single night – meant that God’s plan was imminent as well. So the dreams’ duplication in general proved that the dreams were divine; and the fact that the two dreams occurred in a single night proved that God’s plan was imminent.

In Exodus 2:3, Moses’ mother could “no longer hide him”. After a premature birth to Moses, just six months pregnant, Moses’ mother Yocheved was only able to hide him from the Egyptian, genocidal decree for three months. Why? Because according to Rashi, the Egyptians calculated when nine months would arrive after Yocheved and her husband reunited, expecting them to bear a child only after that time. This proves that the Egyptians’ astrology was false: they continued killing infants fearing the birth of the Jews’ savior...even after Moses was born! But since Moses – the savior – was already born, why did they continue their murders? They must have felt the messiah was “yet” to be born. But they were mistaken, for Moses was already alive for three full months. Again, they failed at discerning a matter through astrology.

In Exodus 1:16 Rashi explained why Pharaoh decreed the death of the males, “for the astrologers saw that a savior was to be born to the Jews”. But this is common sense: any oppressed people possess the probability of an uprising. Here, claims of

astrological knowledge are unnecessary: psychology explains this quite easily. In Exodus 1:22 Rashi states, “On the day Moses was born, Pharaoh’s astrologers told him, ‘today the savior has been born, but we know no whether he is Egyptian or Jew’.” The words “On the day Moses was born...” are misleading, for one might think that Rashi was convinced that the astrologers knew the exact day that Moses was born. However, as a Rabbi once taught, this was not necessarily the first time the astrologers told Pharaoh a savior was born...they may have said this on numerous occasions, exposing their ignorance. Their claim again here, was merely chance.

Saadia Gaon remarks that Egypt’s magic was sleight of hand, and nothing more. (“The Book of Beliefs & Opinions”, pg. 153) This also explains why the Egyptian astrologers could duplicate Moses’ first two signs of blood and frogs: these objects can be manipulated with adequate, tactile dexterity. Saadia Gaon states the astrologers deceived others, using dyes to merely mimic blood, and tossing chemicals into the Nile causing the frogs to flee to the unpolluted, dry ground. Through their deception, the astrologers simulated Moses’ two plagues. However, the astrologers could not manipulate the third plague of lice. Lice are too small for the hand to adequately maneuver. Thus, the Egyptians attested, “this is the finger of God.” They admitted their lack of control, but did so in a way – again – where they were not to blame, for “God is superior”.

Supposed astrological powers or knowledge are repeatedly refuted. No proof for astrological theories presents itself in any of these cases. And astrological claims have yet to be validated.

Refutation in Prophets

But the most glaring refutation of astrology, is God’s very words:

“So says God, ‘To the ways of the nations do not learn, and from the signs of heaven, do not fear, for the nations fear them. For the statutes of the nations are futile, for a tree from the forest they cut, the work of an artisan with an adze. With silver and gold they adorn it; with nails and pegs they strengthen it so it does not disconnect. They are like a sculpted palm tree and they cannot speak, they are carried about for they cannot walk: do not fear them, for they cannot harm and they also cannot do good.’” (Jeremiah 10:1-5)

God clearly teaches man that the nations live in foolishness, that stars or heavenly signs (occurrences) are nothing to fear, and idols are manmade. Man has no reason to attribute powers to his sculpted creations. They cannot speak or walk as man, yet man attributes more powers to these idols, than to himself. Herein is man’s distortion: man is greater and can walk and talk; yet he assumes these inanimate blocks of wood to possess greater powers than he. God exposes the corruption of thought harbored by these nations, and groups therein, the practice of fearing heavenly phenomena. It is no coincidence that God groups heavenly signs together with idolatry in His ridicule. God says both; heavenly phenomena and idolatry are equally futile. Would it then be sensible to claim that the stars and astrology are not for Jews to follow, but for gentiles it is permissible, or that it even works? But God plainly states,

“For the statutes of the nations are futile”. This applies to the object or practice, and it matters none if the followers are gentile or Jews. God states openly “for they cannot harm and they also cannot do good.” These are God’s own words. This satisfies the third of Maimonides’ three categories for determining truth “Torah traditions”: traditions must be true, certainly God’s words, as read here from Jeremiah.

Maimonides’ second category of truths is sense perception, that is, all that we perceive is accurate and truth. And we have no perception or proof of the stars affecting our free will. Just the opposite is the case: our free will is “free” and uncontrolled by anything, but our will alone.

Maimonides first rule is that when something is proven, we care nothing about what we might find, even in the words of the Sages, as he says, “Similarly it is not proper to abandon matters of reason that have already been verified by proofs, shake loose of them, and depend on the words of a single one of the sages from whom possibly the matter was hidden.”

Maimonides teaches that the very fact God gave us commands must be predicated on our ability to comply. We are free to follow God or oppose Him, and therefore, stars and zodiacs contribute nothing to our own choices, for which we are justly rewarded or punished. “For all His ways are judgment.” (Deut. 32:4). “Whose eyes are open upon all the ways of the sons of men, to give every one according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings.” (Jer. 32:19)

Talmud: Astrology or Psychology?

The Talmud (Sab. 156a) suggests that depending on the day or hour of one’s birth, he will possess a certain personality. If taken literally, I can offer no explanation. However, can we answer this in light of what we have stated to this point? But before we answer that, why is the entire discussion in the Talmud concerning one’s “birth”? Why is this moment given such status, when in fact, King Solomon said “Better is the day of one’s death than the day of his birth”? (Eccl. 7:1) Why does the Talmud elevate birth, when King Solomon elevated death? Ibn Ezra answers this question: “at birth, we know not yet what will be come of this child; he might turn out good or evil. But at death, he has already earned his good name.” Thus even Ibn Ezra of whom it is said endorsed “astrology”, did not ascribe to fates, and here commits to his view that at birth, nothing is known. Death is better; for it is only then that we can determine through historical proof, whether an individual is good or evil.

So how then does the Talmud state that if one is born on Sunday, he will be either totally good, or totally evil? Rashi states that since Sunday is the “lead” day of the week, one who is born on Sunday will also be a leader, in either the good life, or the evil life. This explanation removes any need for astrological theories, and uses proven, psychological principles to explain why such a person will lead: he identifies with that “lead” day of the week, which itself would be insignificant, had it not harkened back to God’s six

days of creation. So man is not directed by some unknown, astrological “power”, but functions many times based on his emotions: specifically, his emotion of identification.

Since man’s ego tends to endorse “his” existence with great value, he invests his very first day on Earth with unparalleled significance: “my birthday has meaning” he feels. Thus, he looks at what “other” significant events occurred on that day, to bolster his self worth. He realizes God’s creation is great, and parallels himself to God’s creation by viewing the day of his birth on par with that day of the week in Creation. He then latches on to that day’s significance (the “lead” day in our case) and then creates a self-fulfilling prophecy. The Talmud continues with additional examples: “He who is born on the second day of the week will be bad-tempered. What is the reason? Because the waters were divided thereon. (Division or disunity is caused by bad temper, Rashi) so will he be estranged from other people through his temper). He who is born on the third day of the week will be wealthy and unchaste. What is the reason? Because herbs were created thereon. (Herbs multiply very rapidly and also continually intermingle with other herbs.) He who is born on the fourth day of the week will be wise and of a retentive memory. What is the reason? Because the luminaries were suspended [thereon].”

In all these cases, man’s life then follows what he decided himself. The heavenly phenomena play absolutely no role in determining his fate. We also learn, “All is in the hand of heaven, except for the fear of heaven”. Man is solely responsible for his actions. This Talmudic portion can be

explained reasonably, and with no need to resort to more popular views of astrology. It educates man on his insecurities, and his means to inflate his worth. In truth, King Solomon is correct: one's birthday is insignificant. But it is also true that man is partial to himself, and ignores truths when they counter his ego.

This Talmudic portion concludes with five additional cases where individuals were not subject to planetary influence, but received their good lot based on merit. It is worth noting that two of those cases deal with serpents, which might allude to those cases being metaphorical, discussing man's instincts (serpent), not real events. But even taken literally, we find two opposing Talmudic views debating if astrology offers any true knowledge. On this, Maimonides wrote as we quoted, that we do not abandon what is proven, even if opposed by a sage.

Astrology Equated to Idolatry: Human Insecurity

We see from God's words in Jeremiah 10 that He warns us against attributing any significance to heavenly signs, or idolatry, and He groups the two crimes together, since they are related. In fact, Maimonides teaches that it is precisely man's flawed attribution of greatness to the stars, from which idolatry was born. Idolatry is actually referred to as "Avodas Kochavim", "star worship". Maimonides elaborates on this in his first laws of his Mishne Torah, Laws of Star Worship (idolatry).

To those who cleave to a belief in astrology, you must realize that you cannot claim a belief in something, if you cannot explain it. A Rabbi once defined idolatry as "claiming a causal relationship for things unrelated." He meant to say that idolatry has no basis in reason or what we perceive, so that we should accept it. Astrology is no different: if you cannot explain it, it must not be accepted, as our lives are to be guided by reason. Even if one were to say astrology is a force of nature, but he does not know what it is, it is worthless to say "I agree with it". That is an outright lie. To suggest astrology refers to "heavenly powers which guide human affairs" is a nonsensical statement, if one cannot prove those powers exists, or how they govern man.

Regardless of which Rabbi held astrology to be truth or falsehood, I ask: "Why, without an argument reasonable to your mind, do you accept a premise... just because others do?" Astrology is not an area of Jewish "law", so there is no ruling or "psak". Therefore, feel not obligated to agree with one view over another. And be honest: if there are two opposing views, one must be wrong. And if you cannot reasonably prove your view, your view may be the incorrect one. Certainly, if the opposing view is explained rationally, as Maimonides has done, and as we read in the Torah and know from experience, that man has freewill, why should you not abandon your view in place of what makes sense?

You must also know that if any of the Rabbis were demonstrated that his view was false, he would admit it. We witness this devotion to truth throughout the Talmud. Honesty and truth are at the helm of every Torah

scholar, Rabbi, and Sage. Not a single one remained in his view once disproved, realizing it violated reason, science, or Torah.

You must also be sensitive to your feelings of insecurity, to which astrology caters. Assuming there are "powers out there guiding me" is quite comforting, and relieves one of his responsibilities. He can easily blame all his shortcomings on his horoscope. But remember that the Torah prohibits horoscopists. Horoscopes satisfy the very same insecurities which idols were created to address. This is why God groups idolatry with heavenly signs in Jeremiah: they share the same origin, human insecurity.

Living in line with truth, means we examine all facets of our lives, which are primarily psychological in nature. If you ignore self-assessment and reflection, you will never see your flaws, and never repent, which God desires for our own good.

We are not born with all of the answers...far from it. But with honesty, we can arrive at an ever-growing attachment to truth, where we spend less time defending our predisposed, unexamined notions, and more time defenselessly seeking what is real and true.

Ibn Ezra on Leviticus 19:31 says the following, "Those with empty brains say 'were it not that fortune tellers and magicians were true, the Torah would not prohibit them.' But I (Ibn Ezra) say just the opposite of their words, because the Torah doesn't prohibit that which is true, but it prohibits that which is false. And the proof is the prohibition on idols and statues." Based on this Ibn Ezra, as the Torah prohibits fortunetellers and horoscopists, they must be equally false practices,

affording man lies, and not truth.

Again, as Maimonides wrote, simply because one Rabbi accepted astrology, this is no basis for you to accept it, especially when you do not fathom what he did, or understand his words, and possess reason to refute it. First and foremost, you must know what God said to be true, starting with Jeremiah, and throughout the Tanach...this must be your measuring rod. But do not seek to defend a cherished view, if your mind tells you it violates God's Torah.

The Rabbis state, "All is in the hand of heaven, except the fear of heaven". This means that one's wealth, health, personalities, children and all matters aside from free will are decided by God. Whatever God's means are for determining our personalities or world events, God does so with wisdom, whether we know how He does this or not: "All His ways are just". The One who gave such a perfect system of wisdom, i.e., the Torah, surely works with wisdom. The One who created and governs the universe with intelligent laws is

consistent. Therefore, it is a denial of God's methods of wisdom to follow personalities instead of theories, certainly, when you are bereft of any understanding about what you verbally support and merely follow the masses. God does not wish that man lies, and accept a view, unless man understands that view. Whether on a specific issue a Rabbi was right or wrong, this is not our concern to prove, for all men err. What our Rabbis teach is that we engage our minds alone for determining truth. If some view is contrary to reason, we are wise to ignore it. Judaism's teachers unanimously agree: our "methods" of decision-making are crucial, not who we follow in the end. This may sound odd, but provided we use our intellects granted by God, we are not to blame for concluding something God knows is false. The principle "Lo Bashamayim Hi", "It is not in heaven", teaches that our objective is not to make sure we know what God knows, but that we arrive at decisions to the best of our abilities. "Aylu v'Aylu, Divray Elohim Chaim", "These

and these, the words of God are life", means that regardless of "these views or those views" (opposing rulings) both are nonetheless attempts to arrive at truth, and that is what is praiseworthy, "Divray Elohim Chaim". Of course, when two views oppose each other, one must be wrong, but that is not in man's hands at all times, and not to his discredit. This last quote means to praise all those who honestly engage their minds in the pursuit of truth, regardless of their outcome.

We know quite little about how God governs the world. And just as we admit that point, we must be consistent and admit when we do not understand any other matter. And it makes no difference if a Rabbi claims to understand it. For if "we" do not, we have no grounds to agree with that view, whether he is right or wrong. "Agree" means we apprehend a matter, and understand it as consistent with how the world operates. Our allegiance to a theory must be, as Maimonides taught, based on proof, perception, or Torah Traditions. ■