



JewishTimes

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GOD VS. THE MULTIVERSE

A SERIES: RAMBAM ON THE MITZVAH TO KNOW THAT GOD EXISTS



The
Shabbos



Relying on
GOD

The
Spies



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LETTERS

Removing Kabbala's Influence

Reader: I was reading a monograph on Kabbala from this website and was just wondering how would one remove the influence of kabbala in everyday activities that have crept in over the generations. Thanks.

Rabbi: Make certain all your beliefs and religious performances have a source in the Torah, Prophets or Writings, or in the Shulchan Aruch. If they are not found in any of these, abandon those beliefs or practices. Then think into the fact that kabbalistic notions are baseless, do not comply with reality, and many times contradict reality. Consider that God gave you five

senses, as a means of determining what is real, and what is not. If you don't see, hear, or feel something, then it is not here; it is not real. And God wants you to deny what you do not sense. Therefore, as you do not sense kabbalistic notions, God desires that you abandon them.

The Physical: Not all that "Exists"

Matthew: I don't know if this is just a problem with the English language, but when I read the word "exist" I think "physical." So

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RELIGION of REASON

by Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim, Founder Mesora.org

Are your beliefs true,
or simply popular
among other Jews?

33 pg Preview

www.Mesora.org/ReligionofReason

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Rebbe Worship	Metaphors
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Satan	Do Rabbis Err?
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Jews have succumbed to mystical religion and pop-kabbala. Ten years in the making, the author cites authentic Torah sources unveiling the fallacy of widespread beliefs. He focuses on Torah's brilliance and method of decryption; unraveling metaphors and interpreting texts to reveal hidden gems. Readers will enjoy a long overdue, rational exposé of cultural beliefs, and a unique look at Torah's deep insights. Free 33 page preview at right...

REVIEWS



RABBI REUVEN MANN

Rabbi, Y. Israel of Phoenix; Founder, Masoret Institute; Menabel YBT

Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim has written extensively about the philosophy and Hashkafa of Judaism for many years. As the title of his book, "Judaism; Religion of Reason" indicates, his ideas are rooted in an uncompromisingly rational approach to Judaism. He follows the guidelines of the great rationalist philosophers such as Rambam and Saadia Gaon in his exploration into the values and ideals of Torah Judaism. He is convinced that all of the teachings of Judaism and the statements of the Sages make perfect sense and are amenable to the rational, inquiring mind.

He is absolutely opposed to all forms of "mysticism" and seeks to debunk all practices and beliefs which are rooted in superstition or are contrary to reason. This collection of writings covers a wide variety of topics that are of interest to contemporary Jews. It also contains insightful analyses of Biblical narratives as well as the underlying significance and relevance of many mitzvot.

Rabbi Ben-Chaim demonstrates that Judaism can be harmonized with human reason. Indeed he asserts that one can only understand and appreciate Judaism by analyzing it in a logical manner in order to elucidate its deeper ideas. He is not afraid to ask the most penetrating and challenging questions because he is absolutely convinced that Torah is the Word of God and thus based on the highest form of wisdom.

Jews who have a profound desire to make sense out of their religion will benefit greatly from reading this book. One need not agree with all of Rabbi Ben-Chaim's ideas, but his questions, analyses and original thoughts will open your mind to a new appreciation of the wisdom and logical consistency of Torah Judaism.

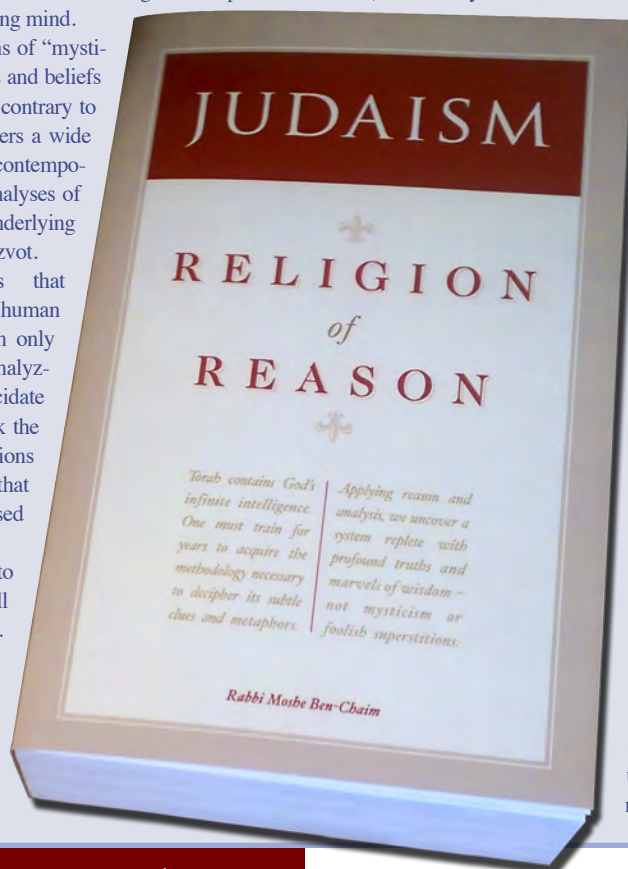


RABBI STEVEN WEIL

Executive Vice President, The Orthodox Union

Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim has followed in the footsteps of the great Medieval Rishonim (Rambam, R. Avraham ben HaRambam, etc.) in trying to explain, define and lay out the world outlook of Torah and the philosophy of Judaism in rational, logical terms. Rabbi Ben-Chaim asks critical, crucial and defining questions that any thinking Jew needs to ask. He is extremely critical of approaches to Judaism that superimpose external methodologies (such as mysticism, other religions) and project primitive emotions onto the

Almighty. Although one can disagree with some of the conclusions; his approach, his questions and method enable the reader to explore and engage our theology in a meaningful and serious way. When Chazal employ certain terms and convey certain images, the student is forced to conceptualize, extract and deduce profound psychological and philosophical principles. Unfortunately, many take Chazal at face value or project onto Chazal, motives and rationalizations they never meant. Rabbi Ben-Chaim following the method of the Rishonim, forces us to define, weigh and analyze each word and phrase of Chazal. Rabbi Ben-Chaim shows there is no contradiction between a serious investigation of Science and a serious investigation of Judaism. Rabbi Ben-Chaim has written a work that addresses the thinking, seeking person of all faiths. This work speaks to the scholar and lay person alike. Once again, one may not agree with specifics within the book but at the same time will appreciate it and gain insight into how the great Rishonim define how we view the world. Rabbi Ben-Chaim's website, Mesora.org is a very serious tool and resource for thinking human beings who want to engage and explore the Almighty, the Almighty's universe and do so within the realm of wisdom, rationality and intellectual honesty.



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Reliance on GOD

RABBI E. MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

*The Parsha:
a lesson in
what is real*

The nation and the Spies were corrupt in their desire to scout Israel prior to entering it. God did not say this scouting of Israel was warranted, but rather that they should enter and they will succeed over the current inhabitants. After 40 days, the spies – excluding Joshua and Caleb – returned with an evil report and incited a riot. The entire nation was frightened by the spies' description of the "insurmountable" giant inhabitants. The nation felt incapable of conquering Israel.

Numbers 14:11 expresses God's disappointment with the nation for not believing in His power to give them Israel. God repeats His phrase, "How long" will they provoke and not hearken. What lesson lies behind the phrase "How long"? God says they didn't believe in Him, despite the wonders He performed in their midst. God repeats this in 14:22,23:

"For all the men that have seen My glory and My wonders that I performed in Egypt and in the desert, and they tried Me these ten times and did not listen to My voice. They will not see the land I swore to their fathers; and all those who provoked Me will not see it."

God sentenced that generation to 40 years in the desert. They would not enter Israel. But why was the punishment for the nation's sin in a correlative form: a year's sentence in the desert correlating to each day of the scouting (Num. 14:34)? And

what is the meaning of God's unique term, "I am God, I have spoken (Num. 14:35)?"

Rashi (Num. 13:2) brings down that God said,

"By their lives, I will give them an opportunity to err with the words of the spies so they don't inherit the land of Israel."

This seems vindictive. But as God is devoid of emotions, how do we understand it?

Had God not permitted the spies to spy-out Israel, they would have harbored an incorrect notion in relation to God. That is, their desire to send spies displayed their disbelief in God's promise that they will successfully conquer Israel. If this disbelief was not brought out into the open, they would remain with this false notion, and this is not tolerable by God. What does it mean that "God gave them an opportunity to err?" It means that God gave them an opportunity to act out this error in reality so it can be dealt with. Giving them a chance not to inherit Israel, means giving them a chance to realize their flaw. In this manner, God enabled the Jews to face their mistake, and correct it.

This teaches us that Israel per se is not the goal, but rather, man's perfection outweighs living in the land. Since man's perfection was at stake, God opted for man's perfection, rather than having them live in Israel at this time.

We understand, God permitted

the scouting of the land so as to allow a national flaw to emerge. What was this flaw? As always, the answers are in the verses...

Twice God states that the Jews failed to apply lessons from the miracles they witnessed. God had performed miracles in Egypt and in the desert. He could equally perform miracles to help them succeed over the most mighty of peoples! Yet, the Jews failed to live by this truth. Their flaw was in attributing greater reality to nature, than to God. They heard there were mighty nations in Israel, and this weighed greater in their assessment of defeat, than in God's word...despite all the miracles they witnessed first hand. They felt human might threatened God's abilities.

Astonishing, isn't it? Would any of you think, had you seen the miracles those Jews saw, that you would harbor disbelief in God? After the 10 Plagues, The Reed Sea splitting, Revelation at Sinai, Manna, water sufficient for 2 million people coming from a rock, and the Quail...would you doubt God's abilities? You would probably say "No", you would not doubt God after such proof, time and again. So why did those Jews doubt God? After all, they were designed no differently than we are designed. Are we any better off than that nation who witnessed the greatest of miracles?!

(continued on next page)

However, today, many Jews in fact harbor this same corrupt emotion. This is seen in the failure to give tzedaka in proper quantities, and the time expenditure at work far exceeding time at Torah study. These two errors are symptoms of a distrust in God, which the Jews expressed back then. Those who give but a small fraction of their wealth to tzedaka instead of the 10-20% outlined in the Shulchan Aruch, fear losing their hard-earned money. They do not trust that God will keep His promise stated in Malachi (3:10), to "open the storehouses of heaven and pour out a blessing that is more than sufficient." Those who work 10 hours daily and learn only 15 minutes, fail to heed the Rabbis' teaching to "minimize work, and maximize Torah (Avos 4:12)." They feel, by working less, they will not receive God's blessings. But God says just the opposite.

In his work Hamaspik, Rabbeinu Avraham, Rambam's son, discusses the purposes of Shmitta and Yovale. We must not work the fields for 12 months and learn to rely on God. Shabbos as well demands we cease from our practical concerns, and learn to rely on God's blessings. The Talmud discusses the great Rabbis who worked just enough for the moment, and then returned to their studies. After all, we take no wealth with us when we leave this world. What we take, is our perfection and joy of wisdom, but only if we learned to enjoy wisdom. And this does happen to those who trust the Sages, and invest greater time in

study, than accumulating wealth that usually is never spent, and not taken with us. God will certainly assist those devoted to His greatest mitzvah of Torah study. Rabbeinu Avraham and his father, Rambam, teach that God will provide an easy livelihood for those who reduce their labors and engage our true objective of Torah study.

In Yesodei HaTorah (8:1) Maimonides teaches that miracles leave doubt in our hearts and lose their affect. In fact, the miracles were not performed to cultivate belief in God, but to address the needs of the nation at those intervals. I would add that after a while, a miracle becomes commonplace...if one follows his emotions.

The generation of the Spies followed their emotions. They should have remained firm in their intellectual realization of God's abilities and promises. This should have been their primary consideration, since it is God who runs reality! But they caved into their emotions, and placed natural law above God. People today too, place natural law above God's promises. We are no different.

This explains why God repeats "How long...". Meaning, the duration of time contributed to the nation's sin. They allowed the repeating miracles, "over time", to become commonplace. By God saying "How long" will they provoke and disbelieve, God intimated the underlying phenomenon of "familiarity" as the cause of their sin.

God also says, "I have spoken." He means to say that His word will stand; they will wander the desert 40 years. But I feel He uses this phrase again to highlight the Jews' error: when God spoke about fulfilling His word and giving them Israel without a need to spy the land, they should have accepted His words as absolute. Now they will be forced to accept His word; His sentence of 40 years will not be abrogated.

Why a correlative punishment; 40 years in response to 40 days? This is because their need to spy Israel was the very expression of the flaw we have discussed. They trusted their own calculations more than God's word. They had an emotional need to "see" what they were getting into. Instead, they should have relied on God's word. But they did not, and as long as they were inspecting the land and its peoples, for 40 days, they were catering to that emotion of disbelief in God. Therefore, their punishment must reflect their flaw, for their benefit, so they might contemplate their error those many years and repent.

Perhaps, the Manna which God fed them those 40 years contributed to their correction, to their reliance on God over nature. For the Manna lasted but a few hours, forcing the Jews to look to God for their daily sustenance over those many decades. ■



GOD VS. THE MULTIVERSE

RABBI E. FEDER & RABBI A. ZIMMER

The Rambam begins the Mishna Torah informing us that we are commanded to know (not merely to have faith) that there really is one, non-physical, Existence that causes all other things.

There are two places where we edited out the proofs (marked by) that the Rambam gives from Aristotelian physics, as they are based upon the idea of absolute rest (which is rejected by the principle of inertia). While the proofs are no longer valid, the fact that the fulfillment of this commandment is via proof from the universe itself has not changed. Modern physics has supplied such a proof in the fine tuning of the constants of nature.

You can "will" yourself to have faith, but you can not will yourself to have knowledge. Knowledge demands an investigation into the nature of reality with an open mind, searching for the truth. You should have confidence that a search for truth and a search for the true God follow identical paths that lead to the same place.

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No proof from current science is absolute. The Rambam's proof fell with Aristotelian science. Any proof from the creation itself is subject to the radical doubt that one's current model of reality is totally wrong. Nevertheless, it is rational and in fulfillment of the commandment to use your mind to the best of your ability to establish what you believe to be true.

Unfortunately, it is anathema to most scientists to recognize a non-physical, intelligent cause. So they deny it. The prevalent trend in explaining away the proof is the theory of the multiverse. Reading Stephen Hawking's article in the Wall Street Journal entitled Why God Did Not Create the Universe, as well as an article in Discover magazine entitled Science's Alternative to an Intelligent Creator, will be helpful in gaining background for some of the issues we will be discussing. Many top physicists believe in some version of the multiverse, and it seems that every year, more and more join the ranks of believers. By some accounts, most physicists currently have faith in it.

In general, the proofs that scientists use for the multiverse are, in fact, the best proofs for One God. There is a part of a person which initially doubts that there is a proof from science simply based on the fact most scientists don't believe in God. However, one's conviction in the reality of the true God can be qualitatively increased when he sees what many scien-

tists are compelled to believe in an effort to deny an Intelligent Cause. The greatest minds of our generation's scientists would not posit something as wildly speculative as the multiverse, were it not for the fact that the necessary alternative is something of infinite intelligence.

Our main objectives are to show a path in studying the deep wisdom in the creation as revealed by modern science, and also to present a proof of God from the constants. We want to make it clear from the outset that we are not seeking to prove Divine Providence from any of these arguments. The proof from the constants only establishes that there is an Intelligent Cause to the universe, not that He relates to mankind in a unique manner.

The proof is predicated on a person recognizing that the universe we observe is special in the sense that it is highly structured and ordered on all scales of magnitude and complexity; that it has incredible beauty, symmetry, and simplicity from its most fundamental laws to the complex organisms that inhabit it. We have never heard of any scientist argue this point, and we think everyone who has basic scientific knowledge understands this point. This amazing interactive site (www.scaleofuniverse.com) helps convey an appreciation of this idea.

We will include many links to Wikipedia articles that further elaborate on background information and on points that we

make. The initial stages of the proof will take the form of an idealized history of how it unfolded, in an effort to show the conceptual development of the problem. We will try to keep these posts as short and clear as possible and we encourage you to click on the links and at least read the first paragraph or two in order to deepen your understanding of the issues involved.

We will only mention a few of the many parameters that science knows are fine tuned. You can find a more detailed explanation of the fine tuning of specific constants in the book Just 6 Numbers by Martin Rees (who also happens to believe in the multiverse), intended for the general reader. There are many other good sources on the web and You Tube, should you choose to pursue the matter further.

We will not be able to take up every point in the articles and videos we link to. However, we will try to answer specific questions you have from the articles or videos in the comments section of each particular post. If you have any questions on what we say, or if you want to add any points that we missed, feel free to do so in the comments. We hope that an active discussion about the ideas of these posts, with us and between the readers themselves, will help illuminate the many nuances of the proof. ■

to say that God "exists", to me, implies He is physical. It just seems to be a problem with the 13 Principles of Faith, in every English version I've read. I don't know if it's different in Hebrew or Spanish or whatever Maimonides was writing in.

Rabbi: "Exist" does not refer only to what is physical. For example, math exists, regardless of there being a universe. So the "laws" — the abstract, non-physical principles — "exist". They are "real." God exists too, He is "real".

Noahide Prayers

Joshua: I'm a Noahide currently deployed in Afghanistan. Are there some prayers I can recite to help me during this time? I know my family back home is praying for me, but the problem is they are Christian. How should I encourage them to pray?

Rabbi: Pray to the God of Noah and Abraham to protect you and all others from harm's way, and to restore you home soon. Ask Him to guide our leaders to make decisions that will secure safety and true goodness for everyone.

Asking Christians to pray means asking to them to commit idolatry. First, they would have to abandon Jesus as the one to whom they pray, which doesn't seem likely without taking time to educate them first.

Afterlife & Resurrection

Reader: The ideas of the afterlife in our faith can be very confusing depending on who is speaking and who's writings are being explained. My understanding is that the soul spends no more than 11 months in a type of purgatory and then enters heaven. At some later point, the soul is reunited with the resurrected body here on earth. This is the general view. If this is so, then the resurrected body stands before God in judgment and the guilty are destroyed. If this is so, then what was purgatory for? Why were partially wicked souls corrected before ascending if they are to be judged in a resurrected body? I also read and heard that only the righteous will be resurrected. But this does not mean that only they will receive an afterlife, since purgatory cleanses the soul and prepares it for what I always thought was eternity. Also, what happens to the resurrected righteous? What is their duration on earth and what is their mission? So then, as you can see, I am not certain on what Jewish philosophy says. Can you explain please?

Rabbi: Yes, there are varying views. Know that God metes out Reward and Punishment to each person after death. Sometimes, a person can receive some reward or punishment, or both, in this world. The righteous people are punished here for what ever sins committed, to pave the eternal life without punishment. The wicked are rewarded here, so as to pave the next life to punishment.

Maimonides teaches that the next, non-physical life is our highest state. It is my understanding that

righteous people will be resurrected here, for the purpose of assisting the world in the messianic era, but they will again return to the afterlife. Nachmanides states the eternal afterlife is on Earth. But my understanding is that punishment, if necessary, takes place after death. There is no second punishment.

These opinions are not empirically based, since the Rabbis teach that only God knows about the next world. Not humans, who have not witnessed the afterlife. This explains the difference in opinions.

But one thing we know for certain: God is just. He will reward the righteous and punish the wicked. The next life will be highly pleasurable for those who have dedicated themselves to following the Torah and enjoying its studies. The righteous Rabbis looked forward to the next life, as they understood the soul survives the body, the same soul that intensely enjoyed Torah here, and will continue on an even greater degree after death.

Reader: I would like to make one more point please. Concerning the days of the Messiah, the world will be filled with increased knowledge of Hashem. This will give both Jews and Noahide a major opportunity to correct their beliefs and overall understanding. This would indicate less time in purgatory and less severe judgment. If this is so, then tell me how this is fair to past generations who grew up in war-ravaged and economically challenging worlds. Clearly their behavior and beliefs on average are likely to be of a lesser quality than those living in the messianic age.

Rabbi: All generations possessed free will. No one sins through coercion.

God will deliver a messiah to assist the world in the future. But righteous people do not need him. Similarly, wicked people will exist in the future too.

Torah's Emphasis

Rabbi: The following are comments I recently emailed to friends as a follow up to an earlier discussion:

"I just remembered a discussion we had one Sunday a few months back. I was describing how mastery of the Torah and the Rabbis' style takes many years. I wrote a new piece this week on mysticism. Its in the Jewishtimes #429 and addresses this, in part.

Towards the end, I refer to the absence of mysticism in Torah, Prophets and Writings. I also address what might be a question to some. It is regarding the witch "resurrecting" Samuel, and also in the duration (430 yrs) of the Jews' dwelling in Egypt. A straight read of these texts suggests that the Torah treats both as literal accounts. But both cannot be literal, as I explained; witches are false and the Jews resided in Egypt only 210 years, as the Rabbis teach.

It occurred to me these are good examples of what I was trying to convey months ago, that Torah does not always speak in literal terms. We touched on the problem with such cases, where we seem unable to

"trust our minds." I feel these two cases show that in fact we can and must trust our minds, but that we have to acclimate our thinking to how God "emphasizes." In these cases (the only cases I know of) God treats as "real," matters that did not occur. But...He does so, precisely because He wishes to convey the "perceived reality" in both cases. There's no better way to teach that Saul "believed" the witch resurrected Samuel, than to say she did! How better to teach that the idolatrous influence (akin to Egypt) affected the Jews for 430, than saying "The dwelling of the Jews was 430 in Egypt!"

So, although the witch did not resurrect Saul, and the Jews lived only 210 years, in Egypt, certain lessons would be forfeited by narrating them literally. The lessons God desires to convey, in their most impacting manner, is done by God treating these phenomena literally. This is but one style of Torah's "emphasis."

I recall having learned Talmud for many years, and after 5 years, seeing a new style of the Rabbis, then 15 years later, another eye-opener. Now, 32 years later, these two cases jump out. This may explain why the Rabbis are referred to as "wise students" (Talmid Chacham) and not wise "teachers." We are always growing, we never leave the stage of being a student."

Why aren't Jews Exiled?

Reader: There are several places in the Torah where the Jewish nation is encouraged to keep the commandments so that they will inherit the land. There are also places where it says what will happen if the Jewish nation doesn't keep the commandments:

"And you will do that which is straight and good in the eyes of Hashem, so that it will be good for you and so that you will come and inherit the good land which Hashem promised your forefathers (Deuteronomy 6:18)."

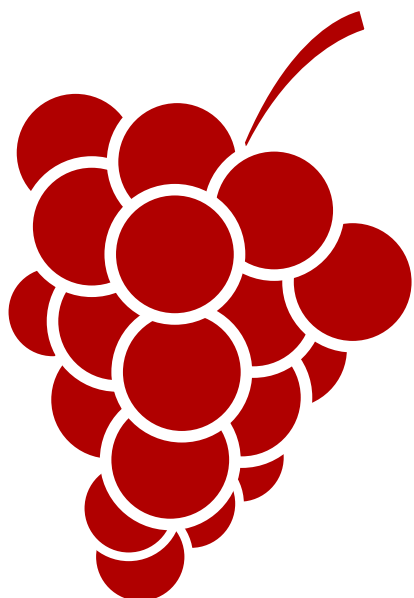
"Guard yourselves lest your hearts turn aside and Hashem's anger will be against you, the heavens will close up and there will be no rain and the land will not give its produce, and you will be banished quickly from the good land which Hashem gave you (Deuteronomy 11:16-17)."

"And you shall keep all of my statutes and laws and do them, so that the land does not spit you out (Leviticus 20:22)."

Less than 50% of the world's Jews consider themselves to be religious, both in Israel and around the world. Israel seems to be flourishing. How can it be that the Jews in Israel aren't being kicked out of the land. I have received several answers to this question. I would be very interested to hear your thoughts.

Rabbi: If you review the sources (Kings II 20:10), it is the specific sin of idolatry that caused the Jerusalem's destruction, exile, and why we will be ousted from Israel as the Shema Yisrael states. But at present, Jews are monotheists. ■

Rabbi Reuven Mann



Seeing for Yourself

This week's Parsha, Shelach, recounts the tragic episode of the spies. The Jews were poised to embark on the triumphant journey to the Promised Land. They would have arrived there in a few days to begin the work of conquest and settlement. However, they were demoralized by the pessimistic report of the spies. Their message was that the inhabitants of the land were mighty and gigantic creatures, with whom the Jews could not hope to contend. The people were crushed by the gloomy report and launched a revolt against Moshe. They went so far as to say "Let us appoint a new leader who will return us to Egypt." The punishment for this disobedience was the decree that they would spend forty years in the desert until the generation of the Exodus perished. Their children would then go forth and inherit the land.

Whose idea was it to send spies? Our parsha states that Hashem commanded Moshe to send forth twelve scouts. However, in recounting the incident in Devarim Moshe says that the people came to him and requested that he send forth spies in preparation for the invasion. Moshe then consulted with Hashem who gave him permission and set forth the terms of the mission. The question arises, was the request for spies appropriate? According to Rashi, it was not. He understands that while Hashem gave them permission He did not endorse the action. Rather, He left it entirely in the hands of Moshe. Rashi, citing the Talmudic Sages, quotes Hashem as saying, "I told them that the land is good. I will give them room to err through the words of the spies so that they shall not take possession of it." It is clear from this that there was no objective need for spies. The Jews were accompanied by the pillars of cloud by day and fire by night. All they had to do was follow the direction indicated to them by Hashem and they would successfully take control of Eretz Yisrael. However, they were not content to leave it at that. They wanted to have a look and see the nature of the land for themselves. According to Rashi the deeper purpose of the spying mission was not to obtain military information. Rather it was to get a view of the land and decide for themselves whether it was "goodly." This motive was inappropriate as Hashem had already guaranteed them that He would bring them to a "good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey." They should have had complete faith in the Divine promise and have no need to "see for themselves." Hashem, however, "leads the person in the direction he seeks to go." He did not interfere with their free will but allowed them to go about it their way.

There is much that we can learn from this episode. The Jews erred because they trusted their superficial view of things rather than be confident in the judgment of Hashem. Man's view of things is very superficial. In instructing Samuel about which son of Jesse to appoint as King, Hashem said "Do not look at his appearance or tall stature for I have rejected him. For it is not as man sees – man sees what his eyes behold but Hashem sees into the heart." Many mistakes are made because we rely on our superficial view of things. In choosing a shidduch, friends, community, etc. we put a lot of stock in our intuitive emotional response to people without ever getting to know them on an in depth level. Our ability to feel an instantaneous attraction often is the decisive factor in making important decisions. We should recognize that our initial emotional response to a place or person is not a true barometer of their actual worth. We should strive to emulate Hashem and develop the skill to "look into the heart." Shabbat Shalom. ■

Praying to the Dead

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

“For the living know that they will die, but the dead know nothing, and there is not left any reward for their memory is forgotten”. (Ecclesiastes 9:5)

Rashi comments on this verse:

“Would it be that the wicked would place on their hearts the day of death, and they would repent from their ways. But after they die, they know nothing and there is no longer reward for actions they could do from death and onward. But in truth, one who prepares for Sabbath eats on Sabbath”. (ibid)

Rashi understands King Solomon literally: the dead know nothing. And since they are now dead, they can also do no more to earn reward. Therefore, they are wise to repent from their ways: “Just as only the one who prepares for Sabbath will eat on Sabbath”, the wicked that prepare (repent) for afterlife will enjoy it.

I mention all this, since the issue of praying to the dead came up in last week’s Parsha, and also since there exists a popular activity that Jews visit graves of the righteous in Israel and other cities. The visiting per se is not a concern, and is even a good custom as it reminds us of our mortality. It moves us to repent, as Rashi suggested. But the problem arises when Jews “pray” to the dead. Despite its popularity, does God allow this, or prohibit this?

Deuteronomy 18:11 prohibits consulting the dead. This prohibition makes sense, since “the dead know nothing”. Of what use is it to ask anything of someone who is not listening? And why not ask God directly? Additionally, King Saul was in violation when he sought to speak to the dead Samuel. So everything tells us that seeking out the dead is wrong.

Our powerful question is this: How did Calev have any right to travel to Hebron and pray to the patriarchs to be saved from the counsel of the spies? And we do not see any word in the Talmud condemning Calev! Yet, he apparently prayed to the dead patriarchs. Talmud Sotah (34b) cites this verse: “They ascended in the south and he came to Hebron”. (Num. 13:22) The Talmud says:

“It should have said ‘they’ came to Hebron, and not ‘he’ came. Rava said this teaches that Calev separated himself from the counsel of the spies, and he traveled [alone to Hebron] and stretched himself out on the graves of the forefathers. He said to them, ‘My fathers, seek out mercy for me that I am saved from the counsel of the spies’.”

So we are faced with a question on Calev’s behavior. Again, in the Talmud (and the sources I researched) no condemnation is mentioned about Calev’s action. In fact, God praises him for having followed “his other spirit”...meaning his intelligence, and did not succumb to the counsel of the spies. I would like to suggest the following answer.

The fact that Calev alone traveled to Hebron is a “deriva-

tion”, as Rava learns this out from an apparently incorrect pronoun, “he” came to Hebron, and not “they” came. Rava did not have any historical transmission about Calev’s travels and activities. If he did, no derivation would be necessary. So no one transmitted to Rava what Calev did...it is all Rava’s own derivation from a single word. How then can Rava say what exactly Calev was doing at the patriarch’s graves?

This is explained as a “drash”, a homiletic lesson not to be taken literally. Rava was stating that Calev must have traveled to Hebron, and no other place, for good cause. And he knew it was Calev who went there, since the other spies were of evil intent. Rava knew the patriarchs and matriarchs are buried there. His question was why Calev went there at this time. Rava realized Calev’s predicament: he sought defense from the powerfully persuasive counsel of the spies. Out of their own fears, the spies sought pretense not to wage war in the land. Calev knew God’s promise to the patriarchs that Israel was to be theirs, and he was confident in God’s ability to win the war. However, Calev was honest with his emotions, and wished to bolster his emotions to shield him from succumbing to the spies. By visiting the patriarch’s graves, his emotions would become more attached to what his mind already told him was true.

Rava wasn’t there, but homiletically phrased as a prayer what Calev was only thinking. Rava wouldn’t dare ascribe praying to the dead, to a man like Calev, who God loved. So in fact, Calev did not pray to the dead patriarchs, as this is a corrupt activity, and all prayers should be to God alone. Rava merely spoke in homily, as he believed would be understood. Rava and all Talmudic sages would always seek to prod our thought, by only hinting to a matter or suggesting impossibilities. Such an approach disguises truths from those not ready, and discloses them to sharpen the minds of those who are ready. Homilies and metaphors also preserve truths for succeeding generations, as startling stories always capture the imagination, and are easily retained in memory. And the very fact that this Talmudic portion does not even mention the prohibition to consult the dead in connection with Calev is support for the fact that Rava’s homily is in fact not literal.

Tosfos is of the opinion that Calev did in fact pray, but he prayed “to God”, and God related his prayer to the dead patriarchs. But no opinion suggests that Calev prayed to the dead: an outright Torah prohibition.

We too must not pray to any being aside from God, regardless of the popularity of this practice of praying to the dead. This prohibition forms one of the 613 commands. Man – whether alive, and certainly when dead – is not as powerful as God. When alive, we have only our brute strength and technology. And when dead, “we know nothing”. So there exists no reason for a man to pray to another man. This is the exact ways of Christianity, where man becomes the object of prayer, and we are commanded not to follow the other religions. Other Talmudic cases that appear to suggest that living man interacted with the dead, must also be taken metaphorically. ■

RABBI DR. DARRELL GINSBERG

“Just one Shabbos and we’ll all be free!”

-Mordechai ben David

We all know this famous lyric (don't deny it), but does it really have any meaning? In this week's parsha, we actually come face to face with the phenomenon of “just one Shabbos”. The incident of the individual who violated Shabbos opens an interesting opportunity for analysis of the importance of, yes, “just one Shabbos”. As we will see, Rashi offers a very difficult explanation, and the Talmud goes further in emphasizing how one Shabbos could have made all the difference. Ultimately, we will see the importance of Shabbos for the nation as a whole.

The Torah introduces the violation of Shabbos in a vague manner (Bamidbar 15:32):

“And while the children of Israel were in the wilderness, they found a man gathering sticks upon the sabbath day.”

Rashi notes the odd mention of the obvious fact that the Jewish people were in the midbar, or wilderness. He offers a surprising explanation (ibid):

“The verse speaks in disparagement (be'genusan) of Israel, [by implying] that they kept only the first Sabbath, and on the second one this one came and desecrated it.”

In other words, this event took place on the second Shabbos they were in the desert; whereas the first one in the desert seemed to be one of complete observation, the second did not follow this precedent.

The Sifsei Chachamim points out a glaring problem with this explanation, namely that it is hard to understand how this was the second Shabbos, or that it followed the first Shabbos which was characterized by a unanimous observance. The Talmud (Shabbos 118b) tells us:

“Rab Judah said in Rab's name: Had Israel kept the first

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JUST **1** SHABBOS?



Sabbath, no nation or tongue would have enjoyed dominion over them, for it is said, And it came to pass on the seventh day, that there went out some of the people for to gather; which is followed by, Then came Amalek. R. Johanan said in the name of R. Simeon b. Yohai: If Israel were to keep two Sabbaths according to the laws thereof, they would be redeemed immediately, for it is said, Thus saith the Lord of the eunuch that keep my Sabbaths, which is followed by, even them will I bring to my holy mountain, etc.”

It is clear from this that the Jewish people did not keep the first Shabbos. After the manna was introduced to the Jewish people as their staple, Moshe explains that they would take double on Friday as none would fall on Shabbos. Why? Shabbos was to be a day of sanctity, Shabbos Kodesh. The response of the Jewish people was telling. Rather than heed the words of God and Moshe, they go out in search of more manna on Shabbos, and find none. Immediately after, God chastises the people for their obduracy, and in response, Bnei Yisrael no longer engaged in this violation of Shabbos (we will re-visit this soon). The Ibn Ezra (Shemos 16:30) points out that from this point on, there was no violation of Shabbos by the Jewish people except for the incident in the wilderness.

It is quite evident then that the Jewish people indeed did not observe Shabbos the first time they had the opportunity. The Sifsei Chachamim offers an insightful answer, differentiating between the original Shabbos as one of engaging in learning of the mitzvos surrounding Shabbos, while the second was when the true prohibitions and performance took center stage (Tosfos in Shabbos 83b offers another answer). This would mean that the violation of the first Shabbos was of a different character than that of the second.

Regardless of the historical accuracy, as this is not the focus here, there are other pressing questions that need to be answered. For one, Rashi makes a bold claim in his explanation. The violation of Shabbos by one Jew caused a denigration of the entire nation – over 1 million people!!! Furthermore, his action did not lead to a rebellion by the Jews, inspiring them to reject Shabbos. This individual was warned he was committing a violation, and was subsequently brought to Moshe to be judged accordingly. So we should try and understand how this one individual's action, through his own use of freewill, could somehow give the entire nation this description of disparagement.

The idea brought by the Talmud needs some clarification as well. Had Bnei Yisrael kept that first Shabbos, they never would have fallen under the dominion of others? How does keeping two Shabboses (one should assume concurrently) lead to Redemption? One other seemingly minor point pops up here. The Talmud points out that had the Jewish people observed the first Shabbos, they would not have lived under the domain of another nation or tongue – for what purpose is the added mention of “tongue” (language) here?

When we look to Shabbos, we must first understand what makes Shabbos unique. We all know on a personal level how important Shabbos is. However, there is another layer to Shabbos, one we see throughout the Torah and the Talmud. Shabbos was the gift given to the Jewish people. This should

not be interpreted merely as something only for the Jews and not for non-Jews. On a deeper level, it is the ultimate expression of our identity as Jews. During the week, we engage with our surrounding empirical world. We work, we relate to the physical world, and we abide by a halachic system that works in harmony with it. Yet on Shabbos, we exit this world and enter the world of the abstract. We engage in studying God, in learning Torah, and in doing so we separate from the world of the empirical. To experience Shabbos as it was designed is to immerse oneself in an experience of the soul, the mind focused and enlightened. This opportunity was given to us, the Jewish people. Our identity as Jews is at its fullest expression on Shabbos. When the entire nation sees and internalizes this value, and is able to realize this identity to its maximum, it unifies us in a powerful way. This could be the allusion to both becoming susceptible to other nations or languages. Language is a feature that is unique to one specific people, and reflects their homogenous identity. In essence, on Shabbos, we are all Jews.

This idea has direct applicability to the flaw exhibited in Bnei Yisrael's inability to keep the first Shabbos. When we look at how the first Shabbos was introduced to the Jewish people, we see an interesting subtle distinction. Moshe explains that there will be a double portion of manna on Friday. As such, he advised the people to prepare the manna accordingly so they would be ready for the following day. Moshe then explains (Shemos 16:25-26), “Eat that [the manna saved] today; for today is a sabbath unto the LORD; today ye shall not find it in the field. Six days ye shall gather it; but on the seventh day is the sabbath, in it there shall be none.” The response by the Jews was to go out and search for the manna on Shabbos (there is a debate as to the specific violation, but this is irrelevant to the main point here), which was the “violation” of Shabbos. God responds as follows (ibid 28):

“And the LORD said unto Moses: 'How long refuse ye to keep My commandments and My laws? See that the LORD hath given you the sabbath; therefore He giveth you on the sixth day the bread of two days; abide ye every man in his place, let no man go out of his place on the seventh day.'”

The reaction this time was that the Jews observed Shabbos.

One can see a shift in language between the original presentation of Shabbos, and God's second presentation. In the first, Shabbos is presented as an opportunity. No mention is really made of any restrictions (this does not mean there were none, just no emphasis). Simply put, Shabbos was there for the taking. Yet after venturing out to find the manna, God now imposes Shabbos onto them – “let no man go out of his place on the seventh day.” There is a profound difference between the two transmissions about Shabbos. Viewing Shabbos as an opportunity is much different than how it was presented the second time. The Jewish people were to set aside the mundane and embrace the world of the abstract, as we described above. Yet they could not break from the mundane, and the way they related to Shabbos would now change. God now had to impose Shabbos upon them, and the focus now became the restrictions – this is the second communication. Had the Jewish people willingly accepted Shabbos, the effect on them would have been everlasting. They would possess an

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Collecting the manna

ideological strength that would not be susceptible to any external influence. Now, Shabbos became something imposed upon them, and its restrictions became more apparent. It took on a different character, and the change in the nation was permanent.

This can also help explain the idea of adherence to Shabbos as leading to the redemption. Clearly, this is not just referring to keeping the halachos. Instead, it is speaking of the desired state of mind the nation should engage in on Shabbos. This frame of mind of Shabbos, where one is purely engaged in the study of God, is truly analogous to the time of the redemption, when in a sense every day will be a “mini-Shabbos”. If the Jewish people experience one Shabbos where the entire nation is united in this experience, they obviously will be at a certain level of perfection. But if they desire to return to this experience, they have demonstrated that the first time was not an aberration. In essence, they are living in line with the mentality of redemption, and the ultimate Redemption is merely the natural next step.

Finally, we return to the issue we raised with Rashi as to the effect this one individual had on the entire nation. There are a number of approaches we might be able to take. One possibility is that the Jewish people had an underlying problem that emerged with the sin of this one individual. There is a sense of collective responsibility that exists among the Jewish people (the area of the *egla arufa* being a prime example), and it is on display here. However, this is not a completely satisfying answer. A friend offered a more credible approach that fits into our overall theme. As we mentioned before, one should not view the concept of Shabbos as being for the Jewish

people solely about keeping non-Jews excluded. There is a positive idea of being exclusive, in that Shabbos serves to express our identity to its fullest extent. However, one cannot deny the fact that Shabbos, being only for the Jews, means that non-Jews are “left out”. As we know, throughout history, there is tremendous resentment (an understatement) exhibited by non-Jews against the Jewish people. Quite often, they look to the ideological weakness of the Jews to provide justification for their anti-Semitism. One famous example involves the 10 Martyrs. The impetus for that heinous act was the distorted attack based on the selling of Joseph. Here too, we see this type of distortion. The anti-Semite recognizes the exclusive domain of Shabbos to the Jews. When he sees the inability of the Jew to adhere to Shabbos, he senses an ideological weakness. This explains the tie-in between the attack of Amalek and the failure to abide by Shabbos. The same can be said about the case of the second Shabbos. The anti-Semite sees one person violate Shabbos and immediately associates it with the entire nation. No doubt it is a distortion, and it is not even something that the nation themselves are collectively responsible for. However, in the area of Shabbos, we must be sensitive. How we present ourselves as Jews to the world is, in many ways, tied to Shabbos.

In the end, we see the importance of Shabbos as it pertains to the identity of the Jewish people. We also see the unique opportunity that the Jewish people had to accept Shabbos, and the impact it had on the nation due to this failure. Finally, we see how the world around us associates our flaw in our adherence to Shabbos with an ideological weakness in the nation as a whole. Through it all, the centrality of Shabbos in the Jewish faith is something that cannot be argued with. ■

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