

JewishTimes

VOL. XII NO. 4 — NOVEMBER 23, 2012

**DEDICATED TO ISRAEL'S BRAVE SOLDIERS
MAY GOD BE WITH YOU**



GAZA

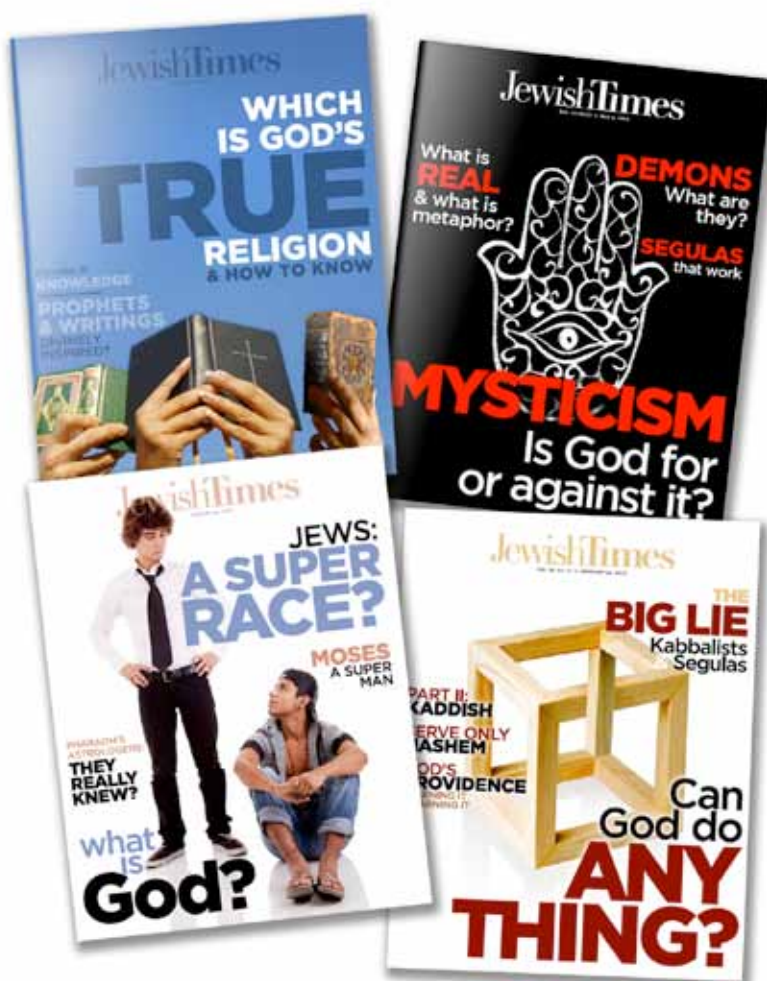
**The BIG LIE of a
Palestinian People
and the Significance
of Jerusalem and the
Temple Mount**

Why advertise with us? Reason #1:

30,000 VIEWS

Reason #2: Low Rates

www.Mesora.org/Advertise
ad@Mesora.org (516)569-8888



JewishTimes

The weekly journal on Jewish thought

Since 2002, thought-provoking original
articles on Judaism, science, Israel and politics.



JewishTimes
Weekly Journal on Jewish Thought

The Jewsihtimes is published every Friday and delivered by email. Subscriptions are FREE. To subscribe, send any email message to: subscribe@mesora.org

Subscribers will also receive our advertisers' emails and our regular email announcements.

Contacts

We invite feedback at this address:
office@mesora.org
Ph(516)569-8888

Advertising

<https://www.Mesora.org/Advertising>

Donations

<https://www.Mesora.org/Donate>

Content at Mesora.org

Jewishtimes Archives

<http://www.Mesora.org/JewishTimes>

Philosophy Archives

<http://www.Mesora.org/Philosophy>

Weekly Parsha Archives

<http://www.Mesora.org/WeeklyParsha>

Audio Archives

<http://www.Mesora.org/Audio>

Interactive Classes

<http://www.Mesora.org/TalkLive>

Search

<http://www.Mesora.org/Search>

Articles may be reprinted without consent of the JewishTimes or the authors, provided the content is not altered, and credits are given.

CONTENTS



Nov. 23

3 Letters

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

Knowledge vs. Wisdom?
Is eternal life guaranteed?
Should one pray for belief in Revelation?

6 Acquiring Israel

RABBI BERNIE FOX

Rabbi Fox explores the verses and commentaries discussing Yaakov's acquisition of the land of Israel

9 Gaza & Israel's Role

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

We expose the Palestinian lie, and obtain unique insight from this week's Parsha into the significance of Israel

13 Jacob's Ladder

RABBI REUVEN MANN

Rabbi Mann shares his keen analysis of Jacob's famous dream, and what exactly it means to each one of us.

20 Lavan's Last Move

RABBI DR. DARRELL GINSBERG

Rabbi Ginsberg explores the mindset of Lavan in his final tactics with Jacob.

LETTERS

Knowledge or Wisdom?

Reader: I love about 95% of your audio discussion on the Torah and philosophy, but what is very disturbing is that the Rabbi uses the word "knowlegde" of the Holy Torah, when I feel he should say "wisdom" which is Holy. I have this issue because Adam and Eve were defiant and ate of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil within an hour of when God told them not to eat from it. To me, that's a major mistake for any Rabbi to say knowlege of the Holy Torah, when its truly Holy Wisdom. Please correct all including myself.

Rabbi: Not knowing the context to which you refer, I cannot determine if I was in error using "knowledge" (da'as) instead of "wisdom" (chochma).

With regards to the Tree of Knowledge (da'as), Adam and Eve immediately received that knowledge, or an awareness (of morality). In contrast, I understand wisdom to refer not to awareness, but the ability to analyze and discern, as God granted Solomon "wisdom" (Kings I, 5:26). Subsequently, Solomon was shown to have greater analysis and discernment. ■

(continued on page 12)

Is Torah mystical... or rational, just like God's natural laws?

It's time a book unveiled the truth.

Is Torah a set of incomprehensible mystical beliefs, as kabbalists suggest...or perfectly reasonable and brilliantly insightful?

Finally learn directly from Torah texts and our greatest Rabbis, precisely why mysticism is false, not Torah, and not God's will.

Religion of Reason unveils widespread "Jewish" mystical beliefs as false, and prohibited. Torah is presented in its rational and provable nature...just like God's natural laws. There are no powers besides God, and He prohibits belief in mysticism. Cryptic Talmudic stories are explained metaphorically offering astonishing insights as intended, and beautiful insights into many Parshas are revealed. Finally, Jews can understand the falsehoods they have accepted, and abandon them in place of true Torah.

REVIEWS



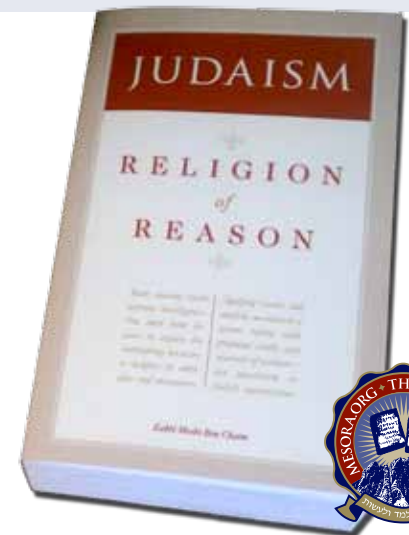
RABBI REUVEN MANN — *Rabbi, Y. Israel of Phoenix*

Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim has written extensively on Jewish philosophy for many years. His ideas are rooted in a rational approach. He follows the great philosophers like Rambam and Saadia Gaon. He is opposed to all forms of "mysticism" and seeks to debunk all practices and beliefs which are rooted in superstition and contrary to reason. This work covers a wide variety of topics, of interest to contemporary; insightful analyses of Biblical narratives as well as the significance of many mitzvot. Rabbi Ben-Chaim demonstrates that Judaism can be harmonized with human reason. He is not afraid to ask the most penetrating and challenging questions as he is convinced that Torah is the Word of God and 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.



RABBI STEVEN WEIL — *Executive Vice President, The Orthodox Union*

Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim asks critical, crucial and defining questions that any thinking Jew needs to ask. His method enables the reader to explore and engage our theology in a meaningful and serious way. Following the Rishonim, he forces us to define, weigh and analyze each phrase of chazal, showing there is no contradiction between an investigation of Science and an investigation of Judaism. Rabbi Ben-Chaim has written a work that addresses the thinking person of all faiths. This work speaks to the scholar and lay person alike and will help you 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.



RELIGION of REASON

by JewishTimes' publisher
Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim



PARTIAL CHAPTER LIST

Astrology	Red Bendels
Reincarnation	Kabbala
Praying to the Dead	Mysticism
Superstition	Miracles
Demons	What is God?
Bashert	"Jewish" Souls
Evil Eye	Talmudic Stories
Rebbe Worship	Metaphors
Segulas	Belief vs. Proof
Satan	Do Rabbis Err?
Angels	Gentile Equality
Western Wall Prayers	Man's Purpose

Free 33-pg Preview:

<https://www.Mesora.org/ReligionofReason>



Project: Develop name, font selection, complete GUI, icon set, and branding for a new music player including desktop and mobile versions. "TRAX" was developed in one week, including all screen transitions and user interaction.



PROFESSIONAL DESIGN

Industry leaders request our print and interactive design.

PROFESSIONAL RESULTS

We increase sales. Our social strategies sustain 600% growth.

We'll grow your business too.

SERVICED FIRMS

ABN Amro
A&E Television
Breyer's Ice Cream
Burger King
Chanel
CNBC
Conde Nast
Disney Films
Entenmann's
Gloria Vanderbilt
Kawasaki
MasterCard
MoneyLine
NEC
Nova
Oscar de la Renta
Pepsi
Pizza Hut
Ralph Lauren
Taco Bell
Trade.com
W Hotels
Warner Bros.
XChange Tel.



NYDESIGN.COM

Building loyalty and sales through design strategies

DESIGN

- Branding / identity
- Sites / touchscreens
- GUI / flowcharting
- Wire frames
- Package design
- Editorial design
- Illustration, icons

STRATEGY

- Business strategies
- Business plans
- Metrics analysis
- Contract drafting
- Copy writing
- Presentations
- Interactive demos

PROMOTION

- Advertising
- Banners
- Promo materials
- App planning/design
- Social networking
- Email marketing
- Landing pages



NYDESIGN.COM
info@nydesign.com
516.569.8888

VAYETZE

Yaakov's Acquisition of the Land of Israel

RABBI BERNIE FOX

And Hashem stood over Him. And He said: I am Hashem the G-d of your father Avraham, and the G-d of Yitzchak. The land upon which you lay I shall give to you and to your descendants. (Sefer Beresheit 28:13)

1. Hashem told Yaakov he would acquire "the land upon which he lay"

Yaakov leaves the home of his parents to travel to Charan. Night falls and he suspends his journey until morning. That night Yaakov has a dream. In that dream he observes a ladder whose feet rest upon the ground and whose top extends into the heavens. Hashem's angels are ascending the ladder and other angels are descending. Hashem stands over Yaakov and addresses him. The first element of Hashem's message is described in the above passage. Hashem tells him that the land upon which he lay shall be given to him and to his children.

The intention of Hashem's message is clear. He is telling Yaakov that he will give the Land of Canaan to him and to his descendants. However, the phrasing of Hashem's message is odd. Hashem does not tell Yaakov that He will give to him the Land of Canaan. Instead, He describes Yaakov's legacy as "the land upon which you lay." Why does Hashem use this description?

2. The entire Land of Israel was folded under Yaakov

Rashi quotes the Sages of the Talmud who explain that Hashem folded all of the Land of Israel under Yaakov. When Hashem said to Yaakov that He would give to him and to his descendants the land upon which he lay, He was describing the entire Land of Israel. At that moment the entire Land was



folded under Yaakov.

Of course, these comments only create a far greater difficulty. The Sages have explained that the reference to the "the land upon which you lay" is in fact a description of the entire Land of Canaan. Yaakov – in fact – lay on the entire Land. However, these comments do not explain why Hashem did not describe Yaakov's legacy in more simple terms – the Land of Canaan. Why did Hashem resort to folding the Land under Yaakov and describing the Land as "the land upon which you lay"?

The Sages respond that this expression was used in order to allude to the ease with which the Land would be captured. It would be possessed by Yaakov's descendants with the same ease that Yaakov took for himself this place to lay for the night. In other words, the message was that the entire Land of Canaan would be captured as easily as one occupies a space of a few square feet.

What are the Sages teaching through this interpretation of the passage? The

Sages seem to begin their discussion by observing a difficult phrase in the passage and resolve the difficulty by presenting an interpretation that is even more enigmatic! Before considering this question, it will be helpful to review an alternative interpretation of the passage.

3. The passage demonstrates a legal principle

The Midrash suggests an alternative explanation of the passage. According to the Midrash, the passage reflects a legal ruling found in the Talmud. The ruling deals with the following case: Reuven agrees to sell Shimon ten fields in ten different locations. They agree that the fields will become Shimon's upon his assumption of possession. Shimon travels to the closest field and assumes possession of that single field. The Talmud rules that by assuming possession of one field, all ten of the fields become Shimon's. The Talmud explains that the fields are joined together by the terms of the agreement. Therefore, assuming possession of a single field transfers ownership of all of them to Shimon.

According to the Midrash, this law is derived from or at least reflected in the above passage. Yaakov lay on a small piece of land. Yet, through his assuming control over this single small area, he acquired all of the Land of Canaan.

4. The entire Land of Israel is a single integrated whole

The suggestion of the Midrash that the Talmud's ruling is referenced in this passage requires further analysis. In the case in the Talmud all of the fields acquired by Shimon are grouped together by the terms of his agreement with Reuven. Therefore, his possession of a single field provides Shimon with legal possession of all of the fields identified in the transaction. How does Yaakov's seizure of a small parcel of land on an isolated hilltop in the Land of Canaan provide him possession of the entire land – including territory hundreds of miles away? Apparently, the Midrash's position is that the entire Land of Israel is a single integrated whole. It is a single continuous entity. Therefore, by taking possession of the

(continued on next page)

land upon which Yaakov made his bed, he took possession of the entire integrated whole of the Land of Israel. In other words, in the Talmud's case the fields are joined into a unit by the terms of the agreement. The Land of Israel in merged into a single entity by halachah – Torah law.

5. Comparing the two interpretations of the passage

Torah Temimah suggests that these two interpretations of the passage are at odds with one another. Both understand that Yaakov acquired the land upon which he lay. The first, suggests that all of the Land of Israel was folded under him. He lay upon the entire Land of Israel and

thereby, acquired it. The second interpretation suggests that although he lay only upon a small portion of the land, this portion is part of an integrated whole. By seizing possession of a portion of the whole, he gained possession of the entirety.

Perhaps, the Midrash and the Talmud are not disagreeing but are simply addressing two different issues. The first interpretation suggests that the entire land was folded under Yaakov. Reduced to its most basic element, this statement means that the land on which Yaakov slept was connected to and representative of the entire Land of Israel. The interpretation is describing the relationship of the small piece of earth on which

Yaakov lay to the entire Land of Israel. It is explaining that by resting on this small plot of land, Yaakov lay himself down on the entire Land of Israel. This interpretation uses a figure to describe this phenomenon – the Land was folded beneath him. It is not attempting to explain the technical basis of the relationship. In other words, the interpretation simply asserts a fact – Yaakov's resting on this plot was equal to resting his body on the entire Land of Israel. The "how and why" of this equation is not the subject of the interpretation. Instead, this interpretation is focused upon why the Torah expresses itself in this manner. The Talmud responds that this expression is intended to suggest

the ease with which Yaakov's descendants will capture the Land.

The second interpretation does focus on the mechanics of the relationship and through this analysis suggests that a legal principle is expressed in the passage. It explains that the passage is treating the entire Land of Israel as an integrated whole. Through his acquisition of a portion of this whole, Yaakov acquired the entirety. However, this interpretation focuses solely on the issue of mechanics – how the acquisition was affected. This interpretation does not address the question of why the Torah does not express itself in more simple terms. ■

New Skywire Technology

60 Days Free Service!



Dear Neighbor,

Xchange Telecom is excited to invite you to participate in an exciting new technology pilot – Skywire home phone service. Skywire provides more reliable and higher quality voice and data service at significantly lower rates.

Participants in this Pilot will receive free local and long distance phone service for the first 60 days. If for any reason you are not satisfied, switch back to your previous provider – no questions asked.

To participate in this Pilot and schedule an appointment for installation, please call us at (877) 7-Skywire (877-775-9947) or e-mail us at: sales@SkywireNetworks.com

—The Xchange Telecom Team

Prices include all taxes and surcharges

Voice-Only Plans	Voice / Data Bundle	Data Only (15/2)*	Additional Services
First Line \$39.99 Add. Line \$24.99	\$59.99 Includes voicemail & Internet (15/2) Add. voicemail \$19.99	\$24.99	Internet Filter \$9.99 Email Only \$9.99

Unlimited USA calling and all Features listed below:

Caller ID w/name, Call Waiting, Anonymous Call Reject, Call Forwarding Variable, 3-Way Calling,

*69 Unlimited Call Return, *66 Unlimited Repeat Dialing, Voicemail

*Rate valid during 12 month promotional period

www.SkywireNetworks.com



Clear and Fast. Skywire

Limited Time Offer, terms and conditions apply. See www.skywirednetworks.com for details. Offer expires 12/31/2012



Need home improvements, but not the high costs?

BBG Services provides affordable, quality home improvements.

Powerwashing of all concrete and brick pavers / pavers sealing & concrete staining (algae mildew and mold treatment)

Stucco – patching & crack repairs

Tile work (ceramic, marble, vinyl) bathrooms, backsplashes, foyers

Painting & Staining – interior rooms, wood, cabinets, texture painting

Minor Plumbing – faucets, sinks, toilets, new shower heads

Minor Electrical – new light fixtures, ceiling fans, new switches, light timers, dimmers

Drywall Repairs – holes repaired, spackled, and painted

Shelving – for closets, bedrooms, laundry rooms, playrooms

Molding – door trim, window trim, base/cove molding, chair rail molding

Recaulking/Regrouting – tubs, showers, tiles, windows, doors

Serving the NY/NJ Metro Area

(845)262-9518

BBG Services
All your home improvement needs

Licensed & Insured – LIC# 2010-03250



The **BIG LIE** of a Palestinian People and the Significance of Jerusalem and the Temple Mount

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

Let's be clear: "Israel" is named after the patriarch Jacob, whom God renamed to Israel. Jacob fathered the 12 Tribes who commenced our great nation. In this week's parsha, Vayeitze (Gen. 28:13), God promised the land of Israel to Jacob and his seed. God rejected all other nations' claims to Israel, and the "Chosen People" status claimed by Christians and Muslims (www.mesora.org/chosen). In that article, we clearly show God's intent, that the land of Israel remain eternally the possession of Jacob's seed. What the world needs to learn, is why Israel is so vital: not to Jews, but to all mankind.

The unprovoked hatred and Arab murdering of Jews is age-old. The Jew was selected by God; not them. Their religion of murder is their attempt to reject the Jews' "Chosen" status. Knowledge alone will once and for all lay anti-Semitism to rest. Unfortunately, the UN, and those reporting "facts" and the news worldwide expose their utter ignorance of the facts and readily-available world history. And the public too has bought in to the Big Lie of a "Palestinian People."

Before 1947, "Palestina" was a land owned by the Ottoman Empire. The name came down from the Philistines who did not live there. From the 1500s through the 1800s it was reported there were about 300,000 citizens (Arab, Christian and Jews). And then in 1917 it was owned by the British Mandate and renamed "Palestine", (about same amount of people, Arabs, Christians and Jews). The Arab country of Palestine never existed. When a different perimeter of that land was offered to the Arabs to be named "Palestine" and become an Arab country, the Arabs refused it. At the same time a different partition of land was offered to the Jews as a Jewish country — in 1947 as a way of stopping the Arabs from continually killing the Jews. The Jews accepted their portion of land, Israel. The very next day, the Arabs started murdering the Jews who already lived there, as well as the new civilians who just arrived after surviving the Holocaust. The people the Arabs are now calling "Palestinians" are the children and grandchildren of those Arabs, and they are calling them refugees even if they never lived there, even though they lived in a different

(continued on next page)

country, but their grandparents lived in the British mandate. Never in History has anyone called generations who never lived in a country "refugees" of that country, and given them rights as refugees. So there never was, and there is not today, a "Palestinian People." But as that term has been used for so long, the ignorant public and the media blindly believe facts that contradict history.

In contrast, not only has there been a Jewish people for thousands of years, but historically, God gave the land of Israel to the children of Jacob, to the exclusion of all other peoples. This was and is an eternal territorial gift, from the Creator of all territories.

Let us understand why God gave a land in the first place; what is so vital about the land of Israel? And I don't mean for the Jews, but for all mankind. As the Torah are God's choice words, there must be a deep lesson enclosed in every verse.

Parshas Vayeitze

We are told that Jacob travelled from Beer Sheva towards Charan. The sun had set, so he took a stone from that place and placed it to protect himself (Rashi). He dreamt of a ladder standing on the ground with its top reaching heaven; God's angels were ascending and descending upon it. God stood upon it and said,

"I am God, God of your father Abraham and Isaac. The land upon which you lie, I give to you and your seed. And your seed will be as the sands of Earth, and you will flourish westward, eastward, to the north and south, and in you will be blessed all the families of the land and in your seed. And behold, I will be with you and guard you in all your travels, and I will return you to this land, for I will not forsake you until I fulfill what I have spoken of to you."

Jacob awoke from his sleep and said, "God is certainly in this place and I did not know." Jacob was fearful and said further, "How awesome is this place, this can only be the House of God, and this is the gate to heaven."

When Jacob arose, he took the stone

that he placed for his head, and made it into a monument and anointed it with oil. He called the name of that place "House of God", for it was called Luz prior to that. Jacob then swore, in response to God's providence, that the stone monument he erected would be a monument to God's House, and that he would tithe what he received from God.

A number of questions arise. What is so important about Jacob protecting himself with a stone, that God records it? And why must Jacob use "that" stone as a monument to God? Quite puzzling are Jacob's words, "God is in this place, and I did not know." Certainly, Jacob, of all people, knew that God is not physical, and certainly, God cannot be "on Earth" or in any place. Jacob (and the Torah) repeats, "How awesome is this place." What is the function of this monument? And of course, what is the meaning of this strange dream of the ladder and the angels, and God's unique message? Finally, where was this place?

The Significance of Jerusalem and the Temple Mount

As we said, all verses are crucial. Why then must we know that Jacob took of the stones to protect himself?

Jacob's behavior was underscored to teach a lesson. Here, he depended on natural law to protect himself as he slept, vulnerable to the beasts of the night. And he was correct to do so. However, God revealed to Jacob that he was to now be under His divine providence, in literally all matters. The humble prophets did not assume God provided in all areas, for who fully knows God's methods, or one's worthiness of providence at any given moment? God showed Jacob this truth of His providence through the image of angels traveling from Earth to heaven, and back. These angles are God's metaphysical forces employed to shield His righteous servants. The ladder teaches of the metaphysical laws that govern Earthly events (Ibn Ezra, Gen. 28:12); a connection or "ladder" of sorts between the metaphysical and physical worlds.

Jacob now learned that he was under

complete providence. Realizing this truth, he naturally desired to share this with all others. Thus, he created a monument to this reality, at the place where he received this message. A monument serves to mark a location or event of significance. He also renamed that place the House of God. The monument was intended to publicize this concept of God's providence.

It is significant that Jacob used the very rock he placed to protect himself. For he wished to demonstrate his "transfer" of relying on nature — i.e., "that" rock — to trusting God's word. Taking the very rock he used in a "natural" manner, and now transferring its purpose to publicize God's providence, he perfectly embodied his own transfer of trust. An enlightening insight to say the least. We fully appreciate the story's opening of Jacob taking the rock, for it forms the central message of how he operated before he was promised God's complete providence, and how he immediately trusted God's word subsequent to his prophetic dream.

However, God is not physical; He does not occupy space. He has no location. So what did Jacob mean by, "God is certainly in this place and I did not know"... "How awesome is this place, this can only be the House of God, and this is the gate to heaven"?

Here we come to another fundamental. That is, God creates divine events on Earth. These events intend to concretize in man's mind, the truth of God's providence. God rules the Earth. He did not merely create it and abandon it.

It is essential that mankind have a reference point. Historical sites of God's providence confirm this truth. Of course, there is nothing that can differentiate one parcel of land from another: that one parcel "contains" spirituality, as falsely assumed. Physical entities are "physical", and therefore not metaphysical, and are unrelated to divinity. This is the sin of pantheism, where people project fantasies of divinity onto the physical world. Similar sinful misconceptions include the belief in magical amulets and auspicious times, and deifying people as infallible tzaddikim and rebbes. In Judaism, we have an idea of designation, such as an

(continued on next page)

animal designated for Temple worship, or in the restrictions to enter the Temple. These laws intend, as Maimonides teaches, to elevate the estimation of those objects and places connected with worshipping God. Sanctity – kedusha – is a halachik construct intended at sustaining a respect for God. But the physical objects and locations do not possess an superior qualities. Israel's soil is no different than that of other lands.

Jacob's exclamation that this "place" is awesome means that this site of his dream was the primary location God deemed vital to teach of His providence. "House of God" and "Gate of Heaven" convey this important principle. For it is through the fame of locations where God creates miracles or communicates with man, that the reality of God, and His providence might spread in the world.

The Rabbis teach that this location of Jacob's dream was in Jerusalem, the Temple Mount. Maimonides teaches, "It is universally accepted that the place on which David and Solomon built the Altar, the threshing floor of Ornan, is the location where Abraham built the Altar on which he prepared Isaac for sacrifice. Noah built [an altar] on that location when he left the ark. It was also [the place] of the Altar on which Cain and Abel brought sacrifices. [Similarly,] Adam, the first man, offered a sacrifice there and was created at that very spot (Hilchos Beis Habechira 2:2)..."

We thereby learn of the vital nature of a reference point, where events are reiterated throughout time, going back to God's creation of man, and man's worship of God. Such sites – the Temple Mount in specific – the greatest

site, continually remind man of God's providence.

What initially gave distinction to the Temple Mount? It was God's creation of Adam. From that point forward, prominent monotheistic figures and Jews, including Adam and his sons, Noah, Abraham, and Kings David and Solomon each recognized the great historical and philosophical significance of this location. They sustained great respect for God through this location via sacrifice. Their unanimous message is that man must be subservient to God's will...primarily, as we are His creations. Their altars, sacrifices and Temples at this precise location throughout Biblical times caused the masses to be reminded of the initial significance of the Temple Mount: mankind was formed from that spot. Sacrifice is a means of showing by proxy that humans exist by God's will alone. We are not necessary. The dead animal takes our place to display the unnecessary nature of our existence. We exist only due to God's kindness. This is true concerning the entire universe. God does not need it; He needs nothing.

Gaza

Why should the world defend Israel? Intelligent people correctly view Moses' Five Books as truth. Jacob's vision recorded in Vayeitze teaches God's will, that the land of Israel embody His divine message of providence. God wishes Jacob's seed alone to remain the owners of Israel. By doing so, Israel becomes a beacon for all people, embodying the truth of the Hebrew Bible's verses. God's Bible and His teachings of providence can be disseminated to all the world, provided Israel

remains in the hands of those to whom He gave it, which echoes God's will.

I believe that the more we publicize the synonymity of Israel, God, and Torah, the less the world will be able to deny the true owners of the land, and the more the Hebrew Bible will be viewed as God's only word. But this means we must all constantly refer to the Torah: studying it, teaching it, and carrying out all of its laws. Not just for the Jew, but for all mankind.

By defending Israel, we defend truth, i.e., God's will. This in turn publicizes God's Torah, for all people, from which His promise of Israel originated. The Prophets speak of the messianic era, where the entire world will finally recognize there exists one mankind, and therefore, one religion. There will be peace. Perhaps, our proper actions can contribute to usher-in that era.

Israel must recognize that the land was given not as an end, but in order that the Jewish nation engage in the entire Torah. Currently, this is not the case. Most Jews and Israelis defend the land, but are not Torah observant. This is a contradiction, for they accept only that portion of Torah that promises Israel to the seed of Jacob, while abandoning a majority of Torah. This is clearly a violation of God's will, one that the nation must address as a whole.

What the IDF fights for in Gaza is a God-given land. But God is clear that the land is given on condition of our Torah observance, which is truly for our good, and known by observant Jews who have experienced a Torah life.

Jewish leaders and those with influence must show care for all other Jews, and teach this primary lesson. ■





Belief in Revelation

Chaim: Why isn't there a separate paragraph in the Shemoneh Essrei devoted to asking Hashem to help us strengthen our belief in Revelation? Many, many Jews have gone astray because they lack the important belief that Revelation occurred. We should pray to God, everyday, to ask Him to remove the elements of doubt in our minds, that the Revelation did happen. Why? Because our conviction and belief that it really did occur is based on a "NEGATIVE" conclusion; down through time, there never was found written books, nor is there other concrete evidence, supporting the idea that the Revelation never took place. Wouldn't belief, be better reinforced through "Positive" proof? What "POSITIVE facts" exist to bolster the proof that the Revelation took place?

Doesn't the high rate of assimilation in today's Jewish society justify our Rabbis' adding another important paragraph to the Shemoneh Essrei, namely, to remove the elements of doubt in our minds, that the Revelation ever happened, and strengthen our beliefs that, indeed, it really did occur?

Thank you,

Chaim

Rabbi: You mention two ideas: 1) that God should grant man conviction, 2) that acceptance of Revelation is merely a result of no "negative" data opposing Revelation.

Addressing the first idea, we must know

that our conviction in any idea can only be the result of our own thinking. God cannot coerce man to gain knowledge or become convinced in what he does not agree with. This is against God's fundamental of "free will." That is, He designed man with the capacity to engage his mind of his own choice. If man so wishes, he can waste his time and not study, leaving him without conviction in Revelation. Just as we do not pray to God to lift the water off the table and make us drink, we do not pray to God for knowledge that He already enabled us to grasp on our own.

And Revelation is not accepted based on the lack of opposition. We possess positive knowledge of Revelation that reached us through the positive act of generations of communication. When we say that fabrication and ignorance are impossible regarding this story, we do not mean there is a "lack" of something. We mean that the positive phenomena of mass witness makes fabrication an impossibility, and the simple elements such as fire, mountain and voice, remove the opposing arguments that Revelation was fabricated, or the reports of ignorant people.

We rely solely on the positive transmission, which could not have spread as witnessed truth, had Revelation never occurred. Yes, others religions based on belief and blind faith also spread. But their lack of witnesses makes them mere faith. We agree that fairy tales can spread, but mass acceptance does not equate to mass witnesses, something found only in Judaism. ■

Roots of Eternal Life

Chaim: After the Torah has been read, the Oleh, (person who has been called up to the Torah) recites,

"Blessed are You, Hashem, our God, King of the universe, Who gave us the Torah of truth and implanted Eternal Life within us. Blessed are You, Hashem, Giver of the Torah."

If Eternal Life has already been implanted in us, why do we need to perform mitzvahs and learn new Torah Concepts in order to attain Eternal Life? Did God plant these roots, UNCONDITIONALLY? When we make negative choices, choices contrary to Torah commandments, and perform negative actions, are we destroying our "Roots of Eternal Life?" Since we are promised Eternal Life, why should we have to repent? When we sincerely repent, will God forgive us, and redeem us, and resurrect us?

Rabbi: Chapter 10 of Talmud Sanhedrin teaches (90a), "All Israel have a portion in the world to come." However, this portion is predicated on one living as an "Israelite" — i.e., following Torah. This applies to one born Jewish and one who converts equally. The Torah lifestyle demands the conviction in certain fundamentals. Rabbi Israel Chait once lectured on the various levels of importance throughout the Torah: "Not all commands and ideals are of equal weight." If one eats non-Kosher, this sin is no where as grave as idolatry. The latter causes one to forfeit his eternal life. For how can man enjoy a greater level of knowledge of God after he dies, when during life, he denied God and bowed to stone or deified men? Such a person has no basis upon which to increase his love of God after life.

Therefore, our negative choices and failure to repent from evil ways and corrupt notions will cause us to forfeit the Afterlife. We can lose our portion, like the three kings and four commoners whom that Talmudic portion describes, who sinned so grievously. ■

VAYETZE

JACOB'S Ladder

RABBI REUVEN MANN



In this week's parsha, Vayetze, we read about Yaakov's journey to the land of his mother in order to escape the wrath of his brother. Eisav did not take kindly to Yaakov's deceptions which had procured for him the blessings which Yitzchak had intended for his older son. In spite of the fact that Yitzchak conferred a lesser blessing on Eisav in order to placate him, the gesture did not work. Eisav schemed in his heart to avenge his brother. Fortunately his respect for Yitzchak was so great that he would do nothing as long as he was alive. His plan was to wait until his father died and then kill his brother. Miraculously Rivka discovered the intentions of Eisav. She apprised Yaakov of the matter and advised him to take refuge with her family. She did not communicate the danger facing Yaakov to Yitzchak. She complained to him about her fear lest Yaakov take a Canaanite woman for a wife. The Canaanite wives of Eisav, who were idolaters, were a source of great pain to his parents. Yitzchak agreed and sent Yaakov to the land of his forebears in order to find a wife.

Yaakov departed from Bersheva and journeyed toward Haran. We are told that he stopped at a unique place and slept there. He had a dream in which he beheld a ladder whose base was planted in the earth and which reached all the way to Heaven. Hashem was above the ladder and told Yaakov that he would not abandon him and that he would return to Canaan and enjoy all the blessings He had promised to Avraham and Yitzchok. It would seem that the main purpose of this prophetic dream was to strengthen Yaakov and reassure him that G-d would be with

him in the difficulties he would experience on his journey. The question arises: What is the significance of the ladder and the meaning of the idea that the "angels of G-d were ascending and descending on it"? Who are these angels and what is the meaning of climbing up and down the ladder? Maimonides addresses this issue in his "Guide for the Perplexed." He says that the angels of G-d are those who seek to elevate themselves in their knowledge and service of Hashem. Judaism does not believe in instantaneous conversions. One has to work arduously and steadily over a long period of time in order to gain a "proper" knowledge of G-d. This is the meaning of the ascent on the ladder. One is constantly climbing, mastering his instincts and immersing himself in study. As he gains true wisdom and reaches the top of the ladder he, inevitably, will encounter Hashem who is "standing over it." The climb up the ladder represents the first stage of a person's life. Each person is obligated to develop himself spiritually and reach the highest level that he is capable of. There is no objective place on the ladder to which all must aspire. Every person is unique and when he achieves his personal potential, that becomes the top of the ladder for him. One should therefore not seek to copy others as that is impossible and a source of great disappointment. Rather, one should be acquainted with his own nature, his strengths and weaknesses and develop himself in the fullest possible manner. When a person reaches the top of the ladder and confronts Hashem, he then begins his "descent." According to Rambam this means he comes back to earth to use his knowledge to teach others. Every Jew has a responsibility toward his fellow Jews. Whatever wisdom and understanding he has been granted by Hashem he must use for himself and generously share with others. We must be spiritually selfish, seeking the most for ourselves and beneficent in sharing our Torah with others. May we merit to attain a genuine knowledge of Hashem and be a source of blessing and inspiration to others.

Shabbat Shalom. ■

LAVAN'S Last MOVE

RABBI DR.
DARRELL GINSBERG

The feud between Yaakov and Lavan reaches a climax of sorts at the end of Parsha Vayeitzei. When the dust settles, Lavan suggests a covenant be established between the warring parties—a reasonable suggestion. And, naturally, such a covenant would have conditions and stipulations, which is standard fare in such situations. Yet when we see the actual conditions placed on the covenant by Lavan, we are left scratching our heads for some type of explanation.

The covenant is presented by the Torah as follows (Bereishis 31:50-53):

“If you afflict my daughters, or if you take wives in addition to my daughters when no one is with us, behold! God is a witness between me and you. And Laban said to Jacob, “Behold this pile and behold this monument, which I have cast between me and you. This pile is a witness, and this monument is a witness, that I will not pass this pile [to go] to you and that you shall not pass this pile and this monument to [come to] me to [do] harm. May the God of Abraham and the god of Nahor judge between us, the god of their father. And Jacob swore by the Fear of his father Isaac.”

There are numerous questions that can be raised concerning this covenant; we will focus on two of them. The first question involved the initial condition Lavan placed on this pledge, namely the possible “affliction” of his daughters, as well as a warning to take additional wives. The commentaries, based on the Talmud, offer a further clarification of Lavan’s condition. According to Rashi,

this condition is Lavan’s insistence that Yaakov not withhold intimate relations with his daughters. Thus, Lavan is not just ensuring Yaakov’s unyielding devotion to his daughters; he wants a guarantee that the marriages will never turn into non-intimate relationships.

Let’s suppose such a conversation took place between a chassan, kallah and the kallah’s father. Imagine the words of caution coming from the father requesting that the chassan never withhold intimacy from the kallah. Not a normal back and forth, to say the least. How can we understand this condition placed on Yaakov?

There is another condition Lavan mentions. He explains that neither one engaged in this covenant ever “cross the line”. The Ibn Ezra explains that this refers to the prevention of one person’s evil intentions towards the other. The Chizkuni goes further, writing that a mutual defense pact was being suggested by Lavan. If Yaakov was attacked by his enemies, Lavan would be bound by the covenant to join in his defense. And, if Lavan were attacked, Yaakov would have the same responsibility.

Was Lavan being genuine here? We know Lavan was one of the reshayim par excellence on the list of the enemies of the Jewish people. Was this a trick?

The key to understanding this covenant is in perceiving the state of mind of Lavan in the moment. Looking back at the events preceding the suggestion of the covenant, we see Lavan incensed. He discovers that Yaakov has outwitted him, and amassed a considerable fortune with his cattle. Lavan chases after Yaakov, only to be warned by God not to harm him. He then accuses Yaakov of stealing his idols. Rochel hides them, and Lavan is left with an empty “J’accuse”. His accusation of theft was, in essence, his last card to play. He had no other moves. He was done.

In this state of mind, he conjures up this covenant. The first of the conditions, as we asked above, seems something strange to ask for. What was Lavan concerned with? Clearly, his relationship with Yaakov had been permanently altered. He assumed that Yaakov would bear a tremendous amount of resentment, viewing Lavan as a ruthless enemy. Therefore, Lavan’s first step was to create a differentiation. Yaakov was

“entitled” to have any lingering aggression towards him, but Yaakov could not view Lavan’s daughters as extensions of Lavan. Lavan was concerned that Yaakov would see his face when he looked at his daughters, and it would anger him. The underlying aggression would manifest in his lack of interest in Leah or Rochel. In reality, Lavan was seeking to ensure that Yaakov would keep the feud between them personal.

With this condition in place, Lavan moves to the second consideration. As we mentioned before, Lavan had played his last card and failed. In this deal he wanted Yaakov to enter into, Lavan wanted to make sure things stayed between the two of them. He was also sensitive to the hatred Yaakov probably would have against him. Now Lavan qualifies how this hatred would eventually express itself – as an act of vengeance. Lavan feared Yaakov striking back at him as a reaction to the false accusations and repeated deceit. Therefore, Lavan sought to create a future where this potential for vengeance was never able to be realized. Lavan would never act “badly” towards Yaakov, and vice versa. Yaakov, bound by this covenant, would keep those emotions of revenge in place. This would appear to be the explanation of the Ibn Ezra. The Chizkuni builds off of this, picturing Lavan as seeking more than simply the guarantee of never acting on the desire for vengeance. Lavan, in fact, wanted Yaakov to offer a positive demonstration that these feelings were not part of the equation. He wanted Yaakov to pledge himself as an ally, knowing full well that such a demonstration meant Lavan was safe.

Based on these explanations, we see how Lavan completely trusted Yaakov to abide by this covenant. At the same time, we are never quite sure what Yaakov is thinking; it is hard to imagine one of the avos bearing such a grudge. However, we do see Lavan’s keen insights into the psyche of the average person, and how he was a wily negotiator. Possessing underlying feelings of aggression, as well as the need for vengeance, are hallmark characteristics of those who fall prey to such deceit as proffered by someone like Lavan. Always worried about protecting his own skin, he creates an everlasting covenant with Yaakov, and succeeds in ensuring he will live another day. ■

Subscribe to the JewishTimes... it's FREE.



Subscribe by emailing
Subscribe@Mesora.org

You will receive our magazine each Friday morning and special issues throughout the year with original, thought provoking articles on Torah, Israel, politics and readers' letters.

Enjoy all 439 back issues free: www.Mesora.org/Jewishtimes