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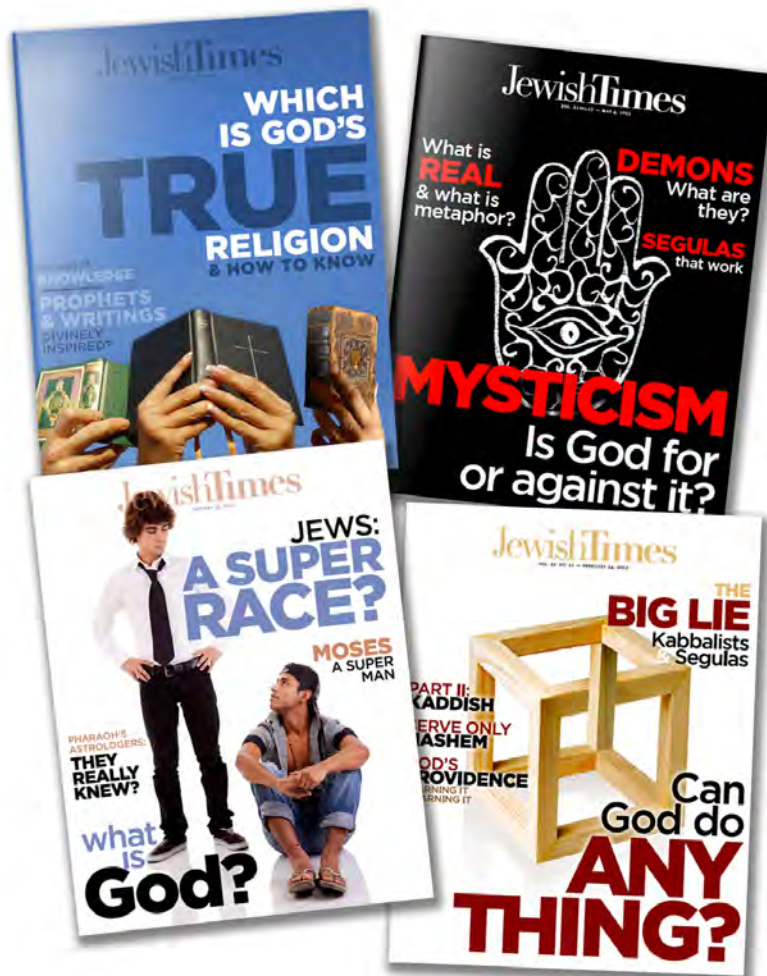
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3 Letters

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

- 1) How do we understand "Satan" and God's "discussion" with him in the book of Job?
- 2) Do our prayers matter if we don't understand the correct ideas concerning who God is? More...

5 Never Forget Hashem

RABBI REUVEN MANN

Rabbi Mann explains the essential need for our blessings. Examining the verses, Rabbi Mann elucidates this topic.

6 40 Days & Nights

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

What significance was there to God's miracle for Moses, enabling him to live 40 days and nights without food or water? Why does Moses include this historical event where he does?

LETTERS

What is Satan?

Reader: In the book of Job, God "talks to Satan." God also "allows Satan to take all of Job's children and possessions," and even harm his body. What is "Satan"?

Rabbi: Maimonides discusses your question (Guide, book iii, chap xxii). He cites the Rabbis who explain that Satan is identical to our instincts. Applied to Job, Satan is a metaphor for Job's instincts. This is the part of man that is separate from the soul, and therefore it cannot "touch Job's soul," as God says to Satan in the book...God tells Satan he may rule over all

Job possesses, except for his soul. This means that Job's instincts, his or erroneous ideas, are what distanced him from God and in turn caused his tragedies. In a manner of speaking, "Satan harmed Job." But man's instincts, his Satan, is not part of man's soul, and therefore, man can abandon following Satan. If he does not, he is removed from God's providence, and is open to harm. Maimonides says Job is not called wise, explaining why Job remained vulnerable to false notions that

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distanced him from God and allowed him to become the victim of harm.

God does not truly "talk" to Satan, since Satan is not a being separate from Job. God's talking with Satan, is the Torah's method of concealing a deeper idea, available only to those ready to accept the idea. If one can discover such a concealed idea, he is ready to grasp it. Many people have difficulty accepting the inner workings of the human psyche. Freud, at the commencement of one of his lectures, excused himself for not being able to dissect a cadaver. For his "patient" was the invisible psyche. Freud's lessons were far more theoretical in nature than a physician's lessons regarding very concrete organs, and subject to greater criticism.

God "allowing Satan to take all of Job's children and possessions," is God's way of teaching us that He created the instincts in a manner that they can affect our physical lives, but not our soul...if we follow our soul, our intellects. ■

No God: No Answer

Rabbi: This week I discussed a very vital concept with an intelligent woman. We arrived at the conclusion that if one's idea of God is false, his/her prayers are useless. For in this case, one prays to an imagination, not to anything real. And imaginations cannot respond.

So it is crucial that we each clarify our understanding of God: ***He is the Creator of the universe, Who is, in no manner, similar to anything He created.*** We just read this in the Haftorah. This truth rejects the false notion of "a part of God in man." People are quite attracted to this heretical nonsense, for it offers them no accountability. "I mean, how bad can I be if part of God is in me?" people think. These Jews violate the prohibition of adding to God's words, and violate our fundamental that God is not subject to division; a very physical attribute.

Other arrogant Jews say a further stupidity, "My Jewish soul is greater than a gentile soul." These Jews are akin to idols who "have lips but do not speak." They don't recall how God spoke to the "gentile" Abraham, but not one "Jew" today can make such a prophetic claim.

She asked me about the preponderance of

Chamsas hung in homes and on jewelry. She rightfully said they are idolatrous, as if a trinket controls God's laws. She was disturbed that the Rabbi she asked first, made excuses for the Jews subscribing to Chamsas, and that the Rabbi should have told each Jew that it is a grave prohibition. ■

What Causes Harm?

Reader: I am in agreement with many of your theological positions. However, your belief that human reasoning leads to truth has been found false, over and over again. Just look at all the misery caused by this "intelligence/reasoning" since the creation of humankind until this very day. Indeed human intelligence/reasoning does not necessarily lead to goodness/truth.

Indeed we must learn Torah/Moral Instruction as handed down from Hashem to Moshe in order to transmit it to, Israel/Upright of G-d, to pass it down to all future generations of humankind; this done in order to correct faulty human reasoning in accordance with Hashem's reasoning; as per Hashem, "My ways are above your ways - My thoughts are above your thoughts."

Indeed human reasoning has its limits and belief in the First Cause of all causes is a necessary must according to Maimonides! May you continue your efforts to find the truth of everything through Hashem's teachings!

Rabbi: You are correct: engaging reason, many still live corruptly. I'd like to use you point to treat of a few examples.

If man starts from a false premise, he can then apply reason, but he must by all means arrive at a corrupt goal. The formula is this: Negative + Positive = Negative. Meaning, if in one's plans he accepts a false notion (Negative), until he removes that false idea, his plans, no matter how well reasoned (+Positive) are all based on incorrect information. Thus, if I think water is a solid, no matter how well I plan a building, using water as my "bricks" will cause failure (=Negative). Again, if I wrongly assume possession alone to determine true ownership, we readily appreciate how this will negatively impact society, regardless of the intelligence we apply afterwards. Enemies of the Jews start

from the corrupt notion that Jews must be killed, then they employ a system of reason to kill us. Had our enemies discovered the knowledge of Torah and what the Jew contributes, they would defend and join us.

In all cases, "reason" is not the villain. The villain is man's corrupt emotions, distorted values, or incorrect notions. So I disagree: intelligence/reasoning are not the villains.

One who engages reason, and is not misguided by his emotions and false values, will lead a life without misery. This is because he or she decides matters as they are in reality, according to God's design. Man will live in harmony, with all natural laws and all people, when using reason. ■

Halacha: Not Divine

Reader: In this past week's Jewishtimes, you write, "Talmud Chullin 124a states that a Rabbi said, 'I would not accept a certain opinion even if Joshua son of Nun said it.'" Rambam uses this as proof that Prophets cannot go against received Oral Tradition. However, what if the Oral Tradition is in error? Why should we stop using logic when we feel Oral Law is incorrect?

Rabbi: Prophets cannot conflict with the Oral Traditions, as we learn, "It is not in heaven." This means that Torah Law was given to man to determine, and is no longer "in heaven", meaning under Divine determination via Prophets. We are not trying to arrive at God's absolute understanding when we decide Torah Law. Instead, we are following God's structured Torah system, where He demands mankind engages intelligence. Torah is a system created by method, not results. We don't say Torah fails when our results might conflict with God's absolute knowledge. Regardless, we follow them, as man's rulings are precisely what create Halacha, Oral Law.

Provided a Rabbi adheres to all Halachik principles, his pronouncement of law actually creates binding law. This pronouncement cannot be termed "incorrect", as he adhered to the correct methods. Torah Law is what intelligence says it is, not what the Prophet knows from God. God tells us this in His Torah (Deut. 17:11). ■



Never Forget Hashem

**Rabbi
Reuven
Mann**

One of the most prominent institutions of Judaism is that of blessings. There is hardly an activity we perform, religious or secular, that is unaccompanied by a bracha. Blessings are recited over food, pleasant aromas, and the performance of mitzvot. In addition, we bless the Creator when we behold magnificent creations, such as the ocean and mountains or when we perceive lightning and thunder. We also bless Hashem over good tidings, as well as bad. The list goes on and on including a vast range of blessings too numerous to mention. It is interesting to note that all of these blessings, except one, were not commanded by Hashem, but were ordained by the Rabbis. Why did the Rabbis see fit to formulate so many blessings? What is the purpose they are supposed to achieve?

This week's Parsha, Eikev, contains the bracha commanded by Hashem, Birkat Hamazon, (grace after meals). The Torah says, "You shall eat and be satiated and bless the L-d your G-d for the goodly land that he gave you." Taking a cue from this verse

the Rabbis went on to require blessings in many other contexts. They said, "If the Torah demands that we praise G-d after we are satisfied, how much more so when we are hungry and about to partake of His food." The question arises, why is it that only the Birkat Hamazon is ordained by the Torah? What is so special about the fact that we have eaten a meal and are now in a state of satiation?

The Book of Devarim is comprised of Moshe's final addresses to the Jewish people. He knew that his days were numbered and dedicated them to securing the welfare of G-d's chosen nation. His foremost concern was that they should succeed in the next phase of their mission, i.e., to conquer the land and establish a society based on Hashem's laws of justice and compassion. A major concern of his was that they would be corrupted by success. Many people have been ruined by the attainment of great wealth and fame. Struggles and difficulties usually make a person humble and grateful to Hashem for whatever He bestows. However, when things go exceedingly well and a person attains enormous fortune there is a tendency to "forget Hashem" and take the credit for oneself. The challenge in life is to always remain humble and remember your Creator. All the good one experiences in this life is an unearned gift from Hashem. Even if you used great acumen and skill in achieving your goals, you must give the credit to Hashem. It is He who granted you life, and endowed you with the mental ability and skill which enable you to achieve your success.

However, the temptations of ego are great. Man turns to his maker in times of need, but tends to "forget" him in his moments of glory. He needs to magnify himself and satisfy his feeling of greatness. When this type of mentality takes hold, it usually spells the beginning of the end. Great individuals, nations, and empires have met their doom because they fell prey to the emotion of self-aggrandizement.

It is because of this that the Torah commanded us to bless G-d after we have eaten and are satisfied. After stating this command, the very next verse says, "Be careful lest you forget Hashem." It then explains, "Lest you eat and be satiated and build good houses and increase your livestock and silver and gold, and your heart will be uplifted and you forget the L-d your G-d who took you out of Egypt." Birkat Hamazon teaches us that it is more important to remember Hashem in times of success than in times of failure. When we experience setbacks, it is natural to feel humble and turn to Hashem. The challenge is to be humble and grateful when we experience great triumphs and all our dreams have come true.

Basing themselves on this philosophy, the Rabbis expanded the range of blessings and mandated them for a multitude of occasions. They knew how fickle we are and prone to forgetting. The purpose of the extensive institution of blessings is that man should be in a constant state of awareness and awe of his Creator. This is the most important element in achieving a life of success and true satisfaction. May we be worthy of this blessing. Shabbat shalom. ■

40 Days & Nights

A Lesson in Priorities

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

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

What is the importance of Moses' 40-day stay on Sinai? In Deuteronomy, Moses tells the Jews that he fasted during these first 40 days on Sinai. (The omission here is of interest) Ibn Ezra states that Moses' fast of 40 days and 40 nights is a "great, unprecedented wonder".[2] But we must learn whether this fasting was Moses' idea, God's command...or

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did it just happen? And what would be lost, had Moses not fasted? He would still have received the Torah, as it says “Ascend the mountain to Me and remain there and I will give you the Tablets of stone, and the Torah and the Mitzvah which I have written to teach them”[3]. What difference would it make, had Moses received the Tablets, without fasting?

Let us review the order of Moses’ ascensions on Sinai. Moses first received and wrote the Torah, commencing with Genesis and concluding with his present-day, the event of Revelation on Sinai located in Parsha Yisro. This means that all of the Torah’s historical content subsequent to Sinai (Parshas Yisro) was not yet given to Moses at Sinai.[4] Moses then descends Sinai and informs the Jews of this Torah, which they accept. On the 7th of Sivan, Moses ascends Sinai for his first of three 40-day periods on the mountain, to receive the first Tablets. On his last day – 17th of Tammuz – Moses learns of the Jews sinning with the Golden Calf. He remains there on the mountain that last day, prays for the Jews not to be destroyed, and receives a favorable reply from God[5]. But keep in mind that during these 40 days until the Jews sinned, Moses’ abstinence from food was not on account of any sin, since no sin was revealed to him until day 40[6]. On this 40th day – the 17th of Tammuz – Moses descends, breaks the first set of Tablets, punishes the wicked Jews, and ascends to pray for the Jews. He prays for 40 days and night, until the 29th of Av: although God rescinded His initial decree to kill the nation, the Jews still bore the sin[7] of the Golden Calf which Moses wished to remove during this second 40-day period. At God’s command to receive a replacement set of Tablets, Moses descends and quarries a new set of sapphire Tablets on which God will inscribe the original 10 Commandments. He then ascends for a final 40-day period dwelling on the mountain, and received complete atonement for the Jews on Yom Kippur, forty days after the 29th of Av. (Rashi)

When describing the actual events at Sinai in Exodus, the Torah omits

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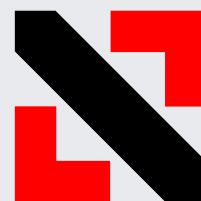
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any mention of Moses' abstinence from food or drink, "...and it was that Moses was in the mountain 40 days and 40 nights." Not a word of his abstinence. Why then does Moses tell the Jews about his fasting when he rebukes the Jews in Deuteronomy? The Torah is silent about his fast until this point:

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

During those first 40 days to receive the first Tablets, the Jews had not yet sinned. Why then did Moses include

this ascent in his rebuke? Additionally, why now does he mention his abstinence from food?

Moses continues his rebuke, "And I beseeched God like at first; 40 days and 40 nights, bread I did not eat and water I did not drink." [9] Here, Moses refers to his second ascent upon Sinai to obtain forgiveness for the Jews' sin. But we wonder, why did Moses commence with the rebuke "And I beseeched God like at first"? What does Moses mean by the words "like at first"? We are surprised to read this, since we already proved that Moses' first ascent was not for any sin of the Jews, but to receive the original Tablets at God's command. This ascent predated the Golden Calf. So what is Moses' equation between his second ascent to

gain forgiveness, and his first ascent? We are forced to say that Moses' abstinence during his first 40 days is somehow akin to his subsequent ascension and prayer for another 40 days after the Jews sinned, where he again did not require any nourishment. What is the equation?

Abstinence: Moses' Lesson

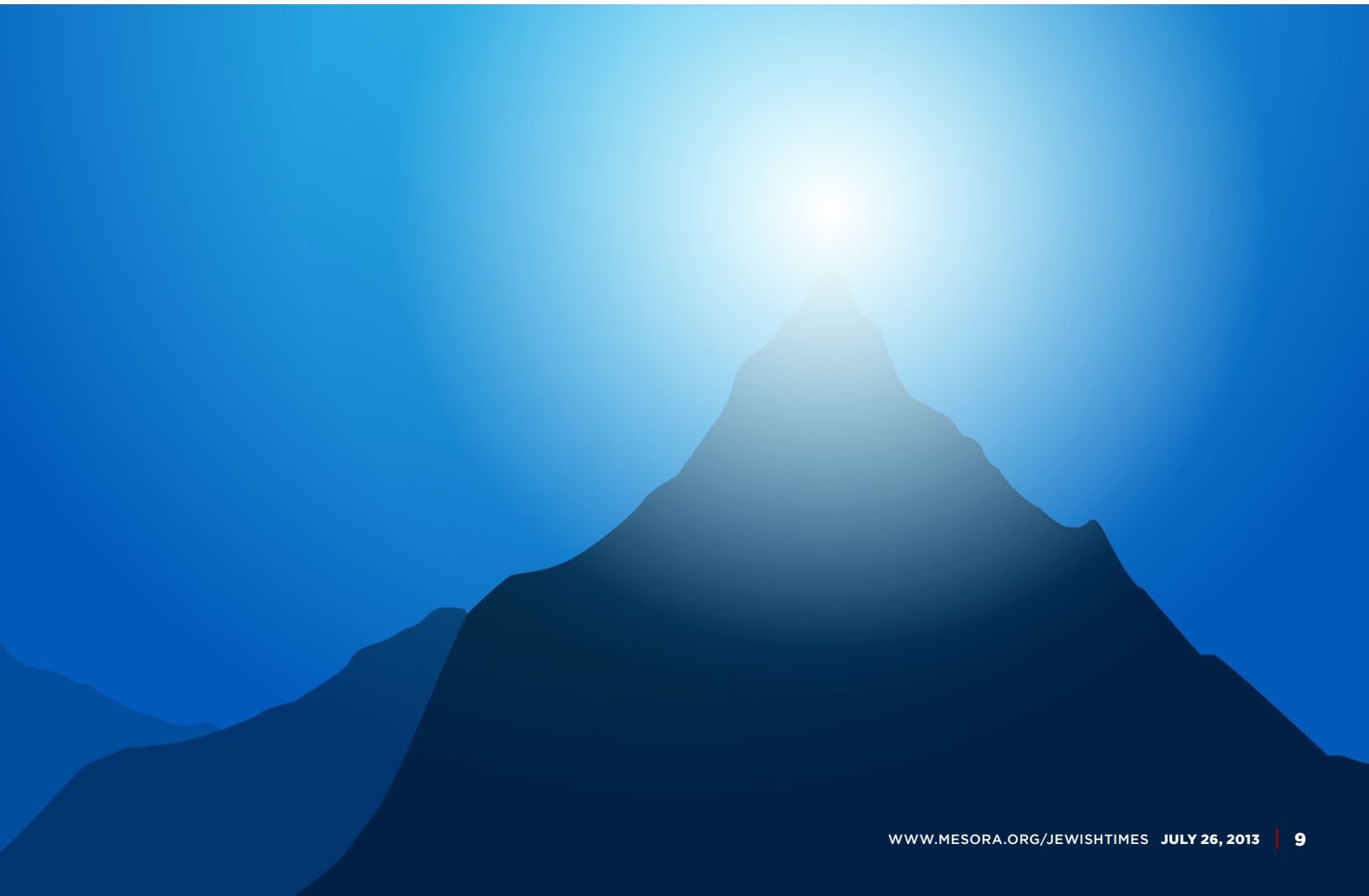
What was Moses responding to with his second ascension on Sinai? The answer: the Golden Calf, the Jews' sin of idolatry. What is this sin?

Idolatry is man's attempt to gain goodness in his life, but does so through the misconception that animals, man, inanimate, or imaginary objects possess powers and can offer goodness. Humans are indeed dependent beings: we require food, clothing and shelter and

have a myriad of insecurities. We sometimes become feeble, unsure that we can provide for ourselves, also in doubt about our future. Therefore, we succumb to hearsay regarding "powers" that can guarantee our needs. We create idols; seek out palm readers, even those as great as King Saul sought to resolve insecurities by inquiring of the dead [10]. Unless we arm ourselves with truths, we will be no different. Parshas Shoftim clearly prohibits all such false practices, as Ibn Ezra says, "the Torah prohibits that which is false." [11]

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

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the Jews that God “did one better” by removing any of his human needs. Idolatry attempts to secure the needs one has according to his natural disposition, that of an organism in need of food, clothing and shelter. And these, an idol cannot accomplish. In stark contrast, not only can God deliver those needs, but also, He can sustain man without needing to satisfy these natures...God can override nature. This is why Moses tells the Jews that he did not eat or drink, even during his first ascent, which had nothing to do with the Jews’ sin. During that first stay on Sinai, Moses attachment to God and His system procured such Divine Providence, that his normal needs were obviated. Revealing this great wonder to the Jews, Moses wished to awaken the sinful Jews to the

exact foolishness of their sin. As an educator, Moses decided to unveil the Jews’ underlying notions that led to their sin: “You sought protection from gold which is inanimate, while God completely overrode my very needs. In this manner, Moses wished the Jews might realize their falsehoods, and abandon them. In this manner, they can truly repent. Informing the Jews that God removed his need to eat, Moses contrasted their idolatrous motivations, which never succeeded, to God’s manifest proof of His complete control over all. This should make an impression on those seeking security, that it could only come from God.

Earlier in Deuteronomy [12] Moses states, “And He afflicted you and hungered you and fed you the Manna

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that you and your forefathers did not know, in order to make known that not on bread alone does man live, but on all that comes forth from God's mouth does man live. Your clothing did not become worn from upon you, and your feet did not swell these forty years." Again, Moses teaches the Jews how God sustained them with a miraculous food, how their clothing miraculously never wore, nor did they show physical symptoms normally met with those who traveled for so long.

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

Moses' lesson is that while we witness natural law to be constant, we must have greater conviction in He who created and guides this law. If God says that Torah adherence will earn us all our needs, we must not abandon Torah because we feel this loss of work hours will lessen our income. We don't know how God will assure our needs are met, and truthfully, we don't need to know, nor can we know. God created this universe...do

you know 'how' He did so? No man ever did. God's knowledge and controls are unknowable, but His words are clear: He will provide, if we live the life He commands, for our own good. So if we are convinced that God exists, and that He does in fact control all, and that He promises to care for our needs if we follow Him, then other considerations must not take priority. Creating Golden Calves we assume will protect us, is an extreme illustration of the same falsehoods we harbor today: we work tirelessly, assuming everything we earn, is a result only of how much we work. God is not in our equations, just as God was not in the equation when the Jews created the Calf.

God addresses this insecurity in Malachi[13], where He says that we may test Him when giving our charity: "...and test Me please with this, says the Master of Hosts, (see) if I do not open up the storehouses of heaven, and empty out (for you) a blessing until you have more than enough". God is guaranteeing that by giving tzedaka, we assure for ourselves financial security, and not an average income, but "until we have more than enough". Our normal disposition is that when we part with money, we have less. But God teaches the opposite.

So what will you follow: human thinking based on natural law, or God, who

created and controls those very laws?

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

[1] Exod. 24:16-18

[2] Exod. 24:18

[3] Exod. 24:12

[4] Rashi, Exod. 24:4,7.

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

[5] Exod. 32:14

[6] Deut. 9:11

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

[8] Deut. 9:8,9

[9] Deut. 9:18

[10] Samuel I, 28:7-19

[11] Lev. 19:31

[12] Deut. 8:3,4

[13] Malachi 3:10

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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.

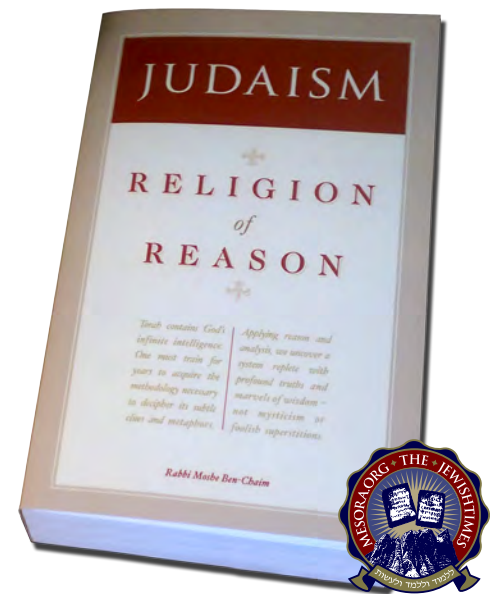


RABBI STEVEN WEIL — Executive Vice President, The Orthodox Union

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.

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