

Other Religions

Lying to their own

Page 3



Temple & Jerusalem

What's so vital?

Page 6

REWARD FOR Mitzvos?

Are they not an ends?

Page 5



"If you study Torah, you have the greatest blessing. If you do not, there is nothing I can give you."

Rav Moshe Feinstein zt"l

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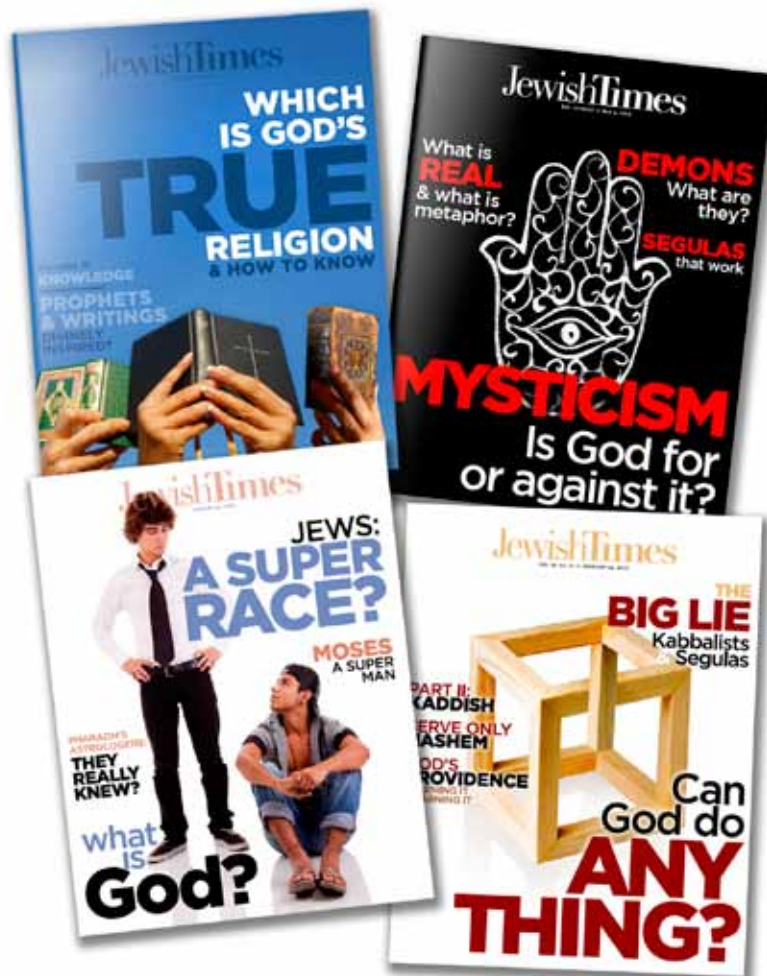
Page 4

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CONTENTS



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3 Letters

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

- 1) Based on God's words, other religions lie to their followers.
- 2) Do you trust doctors more than God?
- 3) The species of man is a worthwhile existence, despite the minority of its members that actualize our purpose.
- 4) Progressing in Torah study.

5 Means & Ends

RABBI REUVEN MANN

Rabbi Mann addresses the fundamental of "reward" for mitzvos. The act of Mitzvah as an ends, is the very good itself, as it perfects us. So what is the additional element of "reward"?

iterations in different locations. Rabbi Fox elucidates Maimonides' distinction of the source texts for the command of Temple, and the command for Temple in Israel. Why are there two verses?

14 2 Options

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

Moses uses visuals to deliver the message: you can choose a life of goodness, or trouble.

6 Temple & Jerusalem

RABBI BERNIE FOX

The Temple went through many

LETTERS

Religions Lie to Their Own

Rabbi: It is most apparent through the study of these first few Parshas in Deuteronomy that all other peoples fabricated their religions. Certainly, as God says:

"Has a people ever heard the voice of God speaking from inside fire as you heard, and lived? Or has God ever come and taken one nation from among the nations with signs, wonders, miracles and war and with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, and with awesome wonders as all God your God performed for you in Egypt, before your eyes (Deut. 4:33,34)?"

Now think: Can God say that such events are "unique and singular" in kind, if He also did this or plans to do this for another nation? The other major religions must ponder these very words, that ironically they adopted and transmit within their religions as truths. It is only their conflict that leads them to distort God's plain words. In truth, God created only one mankind, so only one religion is sensible. If cancer is treated identically for black, white, gentile and Jew alike, must we not take the primary lesson that not only are we each identical in flesh, but also in soul? The true Jew knows this, he respects

(continued on next page)

all people, as each person was created at God's will. All people are equal at birth, it is what we do afterwards that we change our bodies and souls. In fact, we all descend from Adam! Thus, the perfection of our souls must all follow the same path, just as our bodies follow the same remedies. Only one religion is sensible. Only one religion was ever given; this is based on historical evidence.

God made it quite clear through the quote above, and through orchestrating only one Revelation throughout all of history. And He says this will never happen again. Thus, other religions demand faith, since proof is non-existent for any of their claims of Divine Origin.

Adherents to other religions are wise to question their religious beliefs, just as they question anything else in life. Intelligence, reason and proofs are no less vital in religion, than in any other area. A reasoned analysis will unveil that the originators of their religions fabricated their systems, for God never came to any other people. God never gave any other religion. God made one mankind. Only one religion is sensible. God says that in the future, the nations will say, "Our fathers bequeathed lies to us, futility that offers no help (Jer. 16:19)." With this verse, God thereby warns all religions today to abandon their beliefs, search for truth, and follow God's only Revealed words. ■

Trust in Drs – Not God

Rabbi: Many people feel they need not follow the Torah, despite their strict adherence to their doctors' threats of sickness and death, if they abandon his advice. Clearly, people fear doctors and physical death, more than God and spiritual death. Their bodies are real; their souls are not. Or, maybe they feel they know better than God. Or, perhaps, they accept they have a soul, but they have an aversion to God's authority...they do not wish to be subjugated to the will of another being.

The cure: one must study so as to become convinced of God's existence, that He is as real as they are. They must become convinced that God created man and the Torah. With this knowledge, perhaps a few more intelligent people will relinquish their egotistical drive to act freely, and admit that God knows more than doctors, and that we are created at His will for a reason: to live in

accord with the Torah...which is the greatest life. God did not make mankind to suffer, but to enjoy. Is this not the reason He also created the experience of "enjoyment" itself?! ■

Mankind: Worthy of Continued Existence?

Reader: Why did God retain the same gene pool of the former corrupt generations?

Rabbi: God not only retained, but also "created" that very gene pool. He knew what He was doing at the outset, not only what He did by sustaining that gene pool.

If God wished that all beings functioned perfectly, He would have created angels and animals alone, beings that cannot err. He would not have created man. Therefore, it is clear: God determines that a species is worthy of existence, even if only one in a million arrives at its purpose (i.e., Noah); that perfection being intellectual and moral perfection expressed through the pursuit of wisdom for its own sake, and kindness to others. Even in the future when the world will recognize God, man will still possess free will, and the Torah's punishments will be applicable. For Torah applies to all generations; this being an example of God's omniscience for all time. During this future perfection, men and women will still sin, albeit less than in the past. God never performs futile acts, for that would mean He erred, something a Perfect Being with complete knowledge cannot do.

Those people in ancient times (i.e., Abraham, Sarah, etc.) when mankind was severely corrupt without the education the Messiah, benefited from their existence. Those few people justified the species' existence. In the future messianic era mankind, certainly the many who will benefit, justify the species. A Rabbi once said, "The world was created for me." He was not arrogant, he was teaching us that the world exists to enable a righteous person to love God. Even if just one soul.

At times, good people bring upon themselves troubles via the pursuit of matters that they don't truly need for their own perfection or happiness. And if good people become victims of the imperfect or cruel individuals, God has many methods to save them. And if He does not save them,

either they are not deserving, or they can save themselves, but don't, due to poor decisions. Additionally, troubles can also be a punishment. So we must always examine our deeds and repent of our evil or distorted ways.

The numerous Torah and Prophetic accounts of God's providence and punishments are meant to address this issue. As King David said, the righteous are saved from literally every harm. It would be unjust for God to allow a perfect person to suffer. And God can control all variables to protect his righteous individuals. Nothing can stand in His way.

I believe that with thorough and intelligent planning, knowledge of how the world operates, conviction in proper values, and righteousness...we may avoid most problems. We must study all possibilities in all pursuits and predict all outcomes before making any move; expect the possibility of people's greed, error and malice and plan accordingly; seek only what we need and refuse excess wealth/involvements to minimize harm even further; and live in a manner where God protects what we cannot foresee. ■

An Admirable Question

Reader: How do we measure our progress regarding the study of the Torah? Is it even correct to ask that question to myself?

Rabbi: An admirable question! Yes, we must always review our progress. Most definitely. Continued study is obviously vital; never cease. Next, ask questions to wise men, study the great books, and compare your ideas with God's Torah and Talmudic knowledge. This will educate you on where you veer from the truth, and where you are in line with the truth. Always ask God to show you new ideas, your errors, ideas you have missed, and that you should never miss a "fundamental" idea. Knowledge is what King Solomon asked of God, when God offered him anything. Do not accept any idea, from any person...regardless of title or reputation. Ascertain truth by following Maimonides' formula: 1) your senses say its true; 2) your mind says it's true; 3) the idea is located in the Torah, i.e., God's authority says it is truth. Whatever does not fall into one of these three groups, you must not accept for any reason. ■



Our parsha begins with a statement about the blessing which will come “if you listen to the commandments of the L-d your G-d.” It is interesting to note that we are exhorted to “listen” to the mitzvot. One would have thought that the blessings would be made contingent on performing them, more than just “listening.” The commentators point out that the verse can also be translated to state that the blessing is that you listen to the commandments. In other words, the pasuk is not telling us what we will obtain in exchange for our meritorious behavior, but is conveying that the blessings reside in the mitzvot themselves. The question arises, is the reward of the mitzvah the mitzvah itself or may we look forward to extraneous gifts and compensations which Hashem will bestow on us in exchange for our good behavior?

As stated above, the verse makes our blessing contingent on listening to the commandments, as opposed to performing them. The term in Hebrew, Lishmoah, comes from the word Shmah which literally means to hear, but connotes much more. When we say, “Shmah Yisrael, the L-d our G-d is One”, we mean that all should apprehend and take to heart the great significance of the doctrine of the Unity of Hashem. This is the most important tenet of Judaism as it categorically precludes any idolatrous notion of the Deity. Thus, the word Shmah implores us to think deeply and fully comprehend the supreme importance of the matter. It is in this sense that this term is used in reference to the blessings that Hashem has in store for us. They will come if we ponder carefully the deep meaning of the mitzvot and the profound philosophy of life they embody. The greatest honor we pay to Hashem is to study His Torah and appreciate its supreme value. If we achieve this objective, then we will practice and be loyal to it and not be tempted by alien and corrupt philosophies.

And what will be our reward? The Psalmist says, “The Torah of Hashem is perfect, restoring the soul.” Everything that Hashem has commanded us is purely for our benefit. If we observe the Torah properly, we enjoy the best possible life in this world and perfect our souls so that we inherit the world to come. The notion that we need to be rewarded or compensated for doing that which is best for ourselves makes no sense. Thus, on one level, the verse is stating that the blessing is in the performance of the mitzvot themselves. However, the conventional meaning that Hashem will give us bounties for adhering to Torah is also true. We will be blessed with peace, health, and prosperity if we function as a Holy Nation. However, we should not think that these material benefits are of any importance in themselves. Rather, Hashem created us to perfect our nature through adherence to the way of life elucidated in His Torah. He promised that if we listen and strive to implement it, He would smooth our path, remove all obstacles, and provide all benefits which will enhance our ability to partake more intensely of the benefits contained in His Torah. The material blessings of this world are a means to an end. When we have set our focus on the true goal of human existence, Hashem will provide us with all that we need. May we always be worthy of His blessings and have the wisdom to differentiate between the means and the ends.

Shabbat Shalom. ■

The Means and the Ends

Rabbi Reuven Mann

This week's Parsha, Re'eh, takes up one of the fundamental principles of Torah, blessings, and curses. Observance of the commandments or their negation does not come without consequences. Rather, fulfillment of our religious responsibilities will garner for us as individuals and a nation great practical benefits. Conversely, our abandonment of Torah and embrace of alien religions and philosophies will bring upon us the most severe sufferings. Of all the predictions of Torah, none have been proven to be more prescient than those pertaining to Divine punishment. The entire day of Tisha B'Av was dedicated to recounting the almost endless tragedies which have been our lot in this long exile. The Book of Devarim makes it crystal clear that exile, expulsion, and persecution will be the consequences of repudiating Hashem and His Torah. The fact that we are still in exile indicates that we have not yet fully internalized this lesson. Perhaps the time has come for us to pay more attention to the other side of the coin, i.e., that of the reward which the Torah promises.



Temple and the Role of Jerusalem

Temple

Rabbi
Bernie
Fox

But unto the place that Hashem your G-d shall choose out of all your tribes to put His name there, even unto His habitation shall you seek, and there you shall come. And there you shall bring your burnt-offerings, and your sacrifices, and your tithes, and the offering of your hand, and your vows, and your freewill-offerings, and the firstlings of your herd and of your flock. And there you shall eat before Hashem your G-d, and you shall rejoice in all that you put your hand unto, you and your households, wherein Hashem your G-d has blessed you. (Sefer Devarim 12:5-7)

1. Mitzvot and their biblical source-texts

The Torah includes 613 commandments – Taryag Mitzvot. Each commandment is related to a passage in the Torah. In some instances the passage's reference to the commandment is clear and obvious. In some instances the passage does not state the mitzvah in clear and obvious terms. Only through the interpretation of the passage provided by Torah

BeAl Peh – the Oral Law and tradition – does the passage's intended meaning emerge.

It is not uncommon for a mitzvah to be restated and discussed in multiple sections of the Torah. The commentators agree that, in such instances, one of the sections provides the passage that is the fundamental Torah source-text for the commandment. The other sections supplement this source-text.

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Determining which of these sections provides the actual source-text for the commandment is sometimes difficult. However, as shall be seen, this determination plays an important role in understanding the mitzvah.

The above passages explain that we are required to create within the Land of Israel a Bait HaMikdash – a Sacred Temple. Much of Parshat Re'eh is devoted to describing the significance of this institution. The Torah explains that once the Bait HaMikdash is built all sacrifices must be offered there and offering any sacrifice outside of the precincts of the Temple is prohibited. The parasha outlines other national activities whose focal point is the Bait HaMikdash and its environs. These include the tithe – Ma'aser Sheyne – that is brought to the city of the Bait HaMikdash – Yerushalayim – and consumed there in celebration and festivity. The parasha ends by describing the three Pilgrimage Festivals – the Regalim. These are Pesach, Shavuot, and Succot. For these festivals the entire nation ascends to Yerushalayim and celebrates before Hashem.

2. Three mitzvot that became operative when Bnai Yisrael entered the land

Maimonides explains that when Bnai Yisrael entered the Land of Israel they became responsible to implement three mitzvot. These mitzvot were not operative before that point. They were to appoint a king, destroy Amalek, and build the Bait HaMikdash. According to Maimonides, these commandments are sequential and must be performed in order. First the king is appointed. He leads the nation in battle against Amalek. With the completion of that battle and the establishment of security and peace in the land, the Temple is to be built.¹

The commandments were implemented in this order. The prophet Shmuel appointed, with Hashem's direction, the first king – Shaul. Shaul led the nation in battle against Amalek and destroyed this adversary. King David succeeded Shaul. He subdued Bnai Yisrael's enemies and brought peace and security to the land. With the establishment of tranquility in the land, he took the preliminary steps to

(continued on page 9)

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building the Bait HaMikdash. The project was completed by his son Shlomo – King Solomon.

Maimonides provides a source-text for each of these three mitzvot. He cites the passage above from Parshat Re'eh as the text for the mitzvah of establishing the Bait HaMikdash. Indeed the passage does clearly command Bnai Yisrael in this mitzvah.

And let them make Me a sanctuary, that I may dwell among them. (Sefer Shemot 25:8)

3. The source-text for the mitzvah to create a Bait HaMikdash

Maimonides' Mishne Torah – his code of Torah law – includes a thorough treatment of the mitzvah to build a Bait HaMikdash. This discussion includes a delineation of the laws governing the structure of the Bait HaMikdash and its components. In this discussion, he cites the above passage from Sefer Shemot as the source-text for the mitzvah. In fact,

Maimonides consistently cites the passage from Sefer Shemot as the source-text for the mitzvah of creating a Bait HaMikdash. Why, then, does Maimonides depart from his general practice and cite the passage from our parasha when listing the three commandments that became operative when Bnai Yisrael entered the Land of Israel? Answering this question will require some background information.

4. The restriction against bamot

As noted above, with the establishment of the Bait HaMikdash, the offering of any sacrifice outside of its precincts became prohibited. The Talmud explains that prior to the Bait HaMikdash's establishment various precursor entities were created and these also coincided with the placement of some degree of restriction upon sacrificial service.

When Bnai Yisrael traveled through the wilderness, the Mishcan – the Tabernacle – was the focal point to the

camp. The Mishcan was the earliest precursor of the Bait HaMikdash. Sacrifices were offered in it and the design, structure, and components of the Temple were based upon the Tabernacle's design and components.

When the nation entered the Land of Israel, the Mishcan was erected at Gilgal and remained there for fourteen years. During that period, sacrificial service outside of the Mishcan was somewhat restricted. In general terms, communal sacrifices were offered only in the Mishcan. However, private offerings could be brought on bamot – private altars outside of the Mishcan.

From Gilgal the Mishcan was relocated to Shiloh. The Mishcan of Shiloh was a semi-permanent structure. It featured stone walls but it did not have a permanent roof. Its roof was composed of the curtains of the Mishcan. The Mishcan remained in Shiloh for 369 years – until it was destroyed by the Pelishtim. During the Shiloh era sacrificial service was restricted to the

Mishcan. Bamot were prohibited.

The Mishcan was next erected at Nov and then transferred to Givon. It was at these two locations for a total of 57 years. During this period, the restriction against bamot – sacrificial service outside of the Mishcan – was rescinded and private sacrifices were permitted outside of the Mishcan.

The Mishcan of Givon was replaced by the Bait HaMikdash in Yerushalayim. With its completion, bamot were permanently prohibited.²

In short, during the Shiloh period and from the moment that the Bait HaMikdash was placed in service, all sacrifices beyond these structures were prohibited. However, prior to the creation of the Shiloh Mishcan and during the period between its destruction and the establishment of the Bait HaMikdash, this restriction was not completely in effect. Bamot were permitted outside of the Tabernacle or Temple.

This suggests two conclusions. First, the Shiloh

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Mishcan was – in some sense – on par with the Bait HaMikdash. Both engendered an unqualified restriction against bamot. Second, in some manner, the Gilgal, Nov, and Givon iterations of the Mishcan were inferior versions of the institution. They did not engender the unqualified restriction against bamot. What common trait was shared by the Shiloh Mishcan and the Bait HaMikdash? Why were the Mishcan versions of Gilgal, Nov, and Givon inferior?

You shall not do as all that we do here this day, every man whatsoever is right in his own eyes; for you have not as yet come to the rest and to the inheritance, which Hashem your G-d gives you. (Sefer Devarim 12:8-9)

5. The uniqueness of the Shiloh Mishcan and the Bait HaMikdash

In the two passages above, Moshe explains to Bnai Yisrael that with entry into the Land of Israel, sacrificial service will become restricted. Moshe explains that this will occur once the nation comes to its “rest” and its “inheritance”. In other words, Moshe is explaining that entry into the Land of Israel does not in itself engender the restriction against bamot. Instead, the nation’s coming to its “rest” and “inheritance” engenders the prohibition.

Commenting on this passage, Rashi explains that according to our Sages the term “rest” refers to the Shiloh Mishcan. The term “inheritance” refers to the

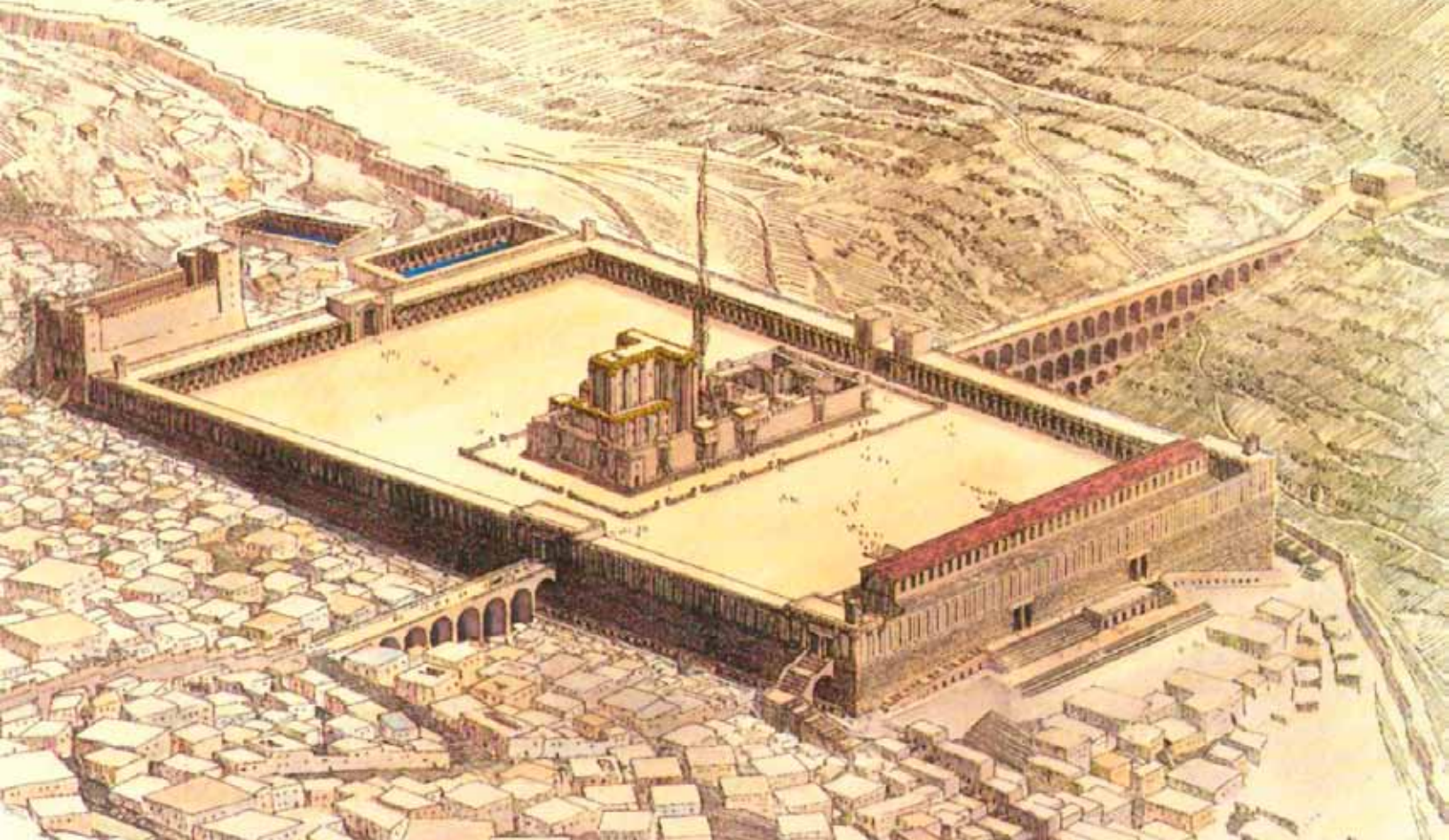
Bait HaMikdash.³ Based on this interpretation, the passages can be restated. They teach that with the establishment of the Shiloh version of the Mishcan, bamot will become prohibited. They will again become prohibited with the establishment of the Bait HaMikdash.

However, the passage provides much more information. It communicates the reason that these two versions of the Tabernacle/Temple engender the prohibition against bamot. The prohibition only comes into effect when the nation comes to “rest”. When the conquest is completed and Bnai Yisrael is – for a time – secure in the land, a Shiloh version of the Mishcan can be created. With its creation bamot

become prohibited. However, with the destruction of Shiloh, the period of “rest” was interrupted. Bamot were again permitted during the era of Nov and Givon.

King David vanquished the enemies of Bnai Yisrael. During his reign Bnai Yisrael asserted its sovereignty over the land. The promise made to the Patriarchs was fulfilled and the Land of Israel became the “inheritance” or legacy of Bnai Yisrael. Now, the Bait HaMikdash could be established. King David initiated this process and his son Shlomo completed it. Again, bamot became prohibited. This time the restriction was permanent.

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6. The unusual structure of the Shiloh Mishcan

This explains two interesting aspects of the various Tabernacles and Temples – all of which can be subsumed within the term “Sanctuaries”. First, as mentioned above, the Shiloh Mishcan was structurally distinguished from the versions of the Mishcan that preceded and followed it. The Shiloh Mishcan featured stone walls. Why did only this version of the Mishcan have this feature? Rashi’s comments provide a simple response to this issue. The Shiloh Mishcan corresponded with “rest” – stability and security in the land. Therefore, it was constructed in a more permanent manner than its predecessors and successors. These other Tabernacles were elaborate tents.

7. The concept of Bait HaBechirah

Second, Maimonides refers to the Bait HaMikdash as the Bait HaBechirah – the Chosen House.⁴ What is the meaning of this name and why is it only associated only with the Bait HaMikdash and not with the versions of the Mishcan that preceded it? Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik Zt”l explains that the term Bait HaBechirah expresses a unique aspect of the Bait HaMikdash. No version of the Mishcan was erected at a location intended to be the permanent site for Bnai Yisrael’s spiritual center. Each site was intended to serve as a temporary location for its Tabernacle. However, the Bait HaMikdash was erected upon the site chosen by Hashem as the everlasting home for His Sacred Temple. No other site will ever replace it. The Second Bait HaMik-

dash was constructed upon the foundations of the First Temple. The third and final Bait HaMikdash will occupy the same location. This is the “chosen” element of the Bait HaBechirah. It is erected upon the site chosen by Hashem as the everlasting location of His Sacred Temple.

The selection of a permanent site for the Bait HaMikdash only became meaningful when the Land of Israel was secured as the inheritance of Bnai Yisrael. The term “inheritance” implies a permanent legacy. When the land becomes the permanent legacy of Bnai Yisrael it can have a site selected as its everlasting spiritual center. Before the land became Bnai Yisrael’s inheritance and permanent legacy, it could not feature a site endowed with everlasting status.

8. Each source-text is selected with precision

Now, the original question can be reconsidered. Maimonides consistently refers to the Sefer Shemot passage as the biblical source-text for the commandment to create a Bait HaMikdash. However, in describing the three commandments that the nation is enjoined to execute upon entering the Land of Israel, Maimonides cites the passage from Parshat Re’eh as the biblical source-text legislating the establishment of the Bait HaMikdash. Why does Maimonides not cite the passage from Sefer Shemot in this context?

In Maimonides’ discussion of the mitzvah to create the Bait HaMikdash, he begins with a description of the iterations of the Mishcan that preceded it. Maimonides’

(continued on page 13)

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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.

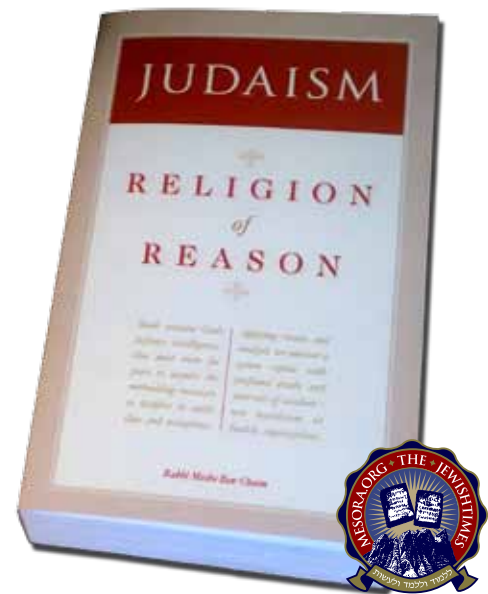


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Astrology	Red Bendels
Reincarnation	Kabbala
Praying to the Dead	Mysticism
Superstition	Miracles
Demons	What is God?
Bashert	"Jewish" Souls
Evil Eye	Talmudic Stories
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inclusion of the precursors to the Bait HaMikdash in this section suggests that he regards the various versions of the Mishcan and the Bait HaMikdash itself as expressions of a single commandment. In other words, the mitzvah to create a Mikdash is fulfilled through different structures in different eras. In the wilderness it was fulfilled with the creation of the original Mishcan. All of the iterations of the Mishcan that were created in the Land of Israel were the appropriate expressions of the mitzvah. Each was appropriate for its era. The Bait HaMikdash represents the final and highest expression of the mitzvah. In short, the commandment enjoins us to create a Mikdash or Sanctuary. The appropriate form for that Sanctuary varies with the era.

As Maimonides explains, one of the mitzvot that Bnai

Yisrael were directed to perform upon entry into the Land of Israel was the creation of the Bait HaMikdash. Maimonides is precise in his selection of source-texts. In this context, the passage from Sefer Shemot does not suffice as a source-text. That passage is the source-text for the general commandment to create a Mikdash – a Sanctuary. That commandment is fulfilled through the Mishcan as well as the Bait HaMikdash. The passage Maimonides selects is not the source-text for the overall commandment. He cites the passage that directs Bnai Yisrael to create a Bait HaBechirah – a specific expression of the overall mitzvah. This passage communicates that once Bnai Yisrael enters the land and has made it the inheritance or legacy of the nation, it must create a Bait HaMikdash – a permanent Bait HaBechirah.

Therefore, in this context, this passage is the proper source-text. It is not the biblical foundation of the general mitzvah. Instead, it explains that after sovereignty is established, the nation is directed to give the mitzvah its highest expression. A Bait HaBechirah must be created.⁵

9. The spiritual nature of the Land of Israel

It is possible that the Torah is communicating to us that the Land of Israel becomes our inheritance – our legacy only with the creation of the Bait HaMikdash. True, the nation must establish sovereignty over the land before building the Sacred Temple. However, sovereignty is necessary but not adequate – in itself – to transform the land into the permanent legacy of the nation. This transformation requires that

Bnai Yisrael superimpose upon the material land a spiritual character. The selection of a permanent site for the Bait HaMikdash accomplishes this transformation. This site becomes the heart and soul of the land. The entire land draws from and reflects the sanctity of this focal point of national communal life. ■

1. Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Mishne Torah, Hilchot Melachim 1:1-2.

2. Meschet Zevachim 14:4-8.

3. Rabbaynu Shlomo ben Yitzchak (Rashi), Commentary on Sefer Devarim 12:9.

4. Maimonides entitles the section of his code that deals with the structure and design of the Bait HaMikdash “the laws of the Bait HaBechirah”.

5. The main insight presented above is suggested by a lecture of Rav Aharon Kahn (bit.ly/1ci3RQx). The balance of the material is an elaboration and extension of the insight suggested by his lecture.

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2

OPTIONS AND IT'S YOUR CHOICE

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

PARSHA

BLESSINGS & CURSES ON THE MOUNTAINS

Moses desired that the people – and we – take to heart the fortune and consequences of following or abandoning Torah. Proper conduct leads to our retaining the gift of Israel, as seen by the blessing being placed upon the lush Mt. Grizzim. However, if one abandons God, the fate of a barren Mt. Eval is certain. Moses desired the best for the Jews, and showing them real differences between bountiful and barren topography would be the best means to drive home this point, the truth of the Land's purpose, and the real results of one's actions.

The two goats on Yom Kippur also teach that there's but two possibilities. If you choose the Torah, then you are like the goat offered to God. If you do not, then you are like the second goat destined for tragedy as it is sliced to death as it descends over the rocky outline of Mt. Azazel.

The concept of blessing and curse need not be understood other than the actual experienced lifestyle. Following the Torah itself, is the blessing, the pure enjoyment of the pursuit of wisdom. Conversely, abandoning a life of wisdom will result in constant frustration and a life of pain.

To say there is blessing besides the Torah is false and diminishes the Torah's worth. To suggest another pain aside from abandoning Torah is unnecessary. ■



A man asked Rav Moshe Feinstein zt"l for a blessing. Rav Moshe said, "If you are learning Torah, you have the greatest blessing already. If you are not, there is nothing I can give you."



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