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Proving Judaism

The Fallacy of
All Others

Page 3

Eli's Insights

Page 4

Disproving Jews

Fallacy of Supremacy

Page 3

True Compassion

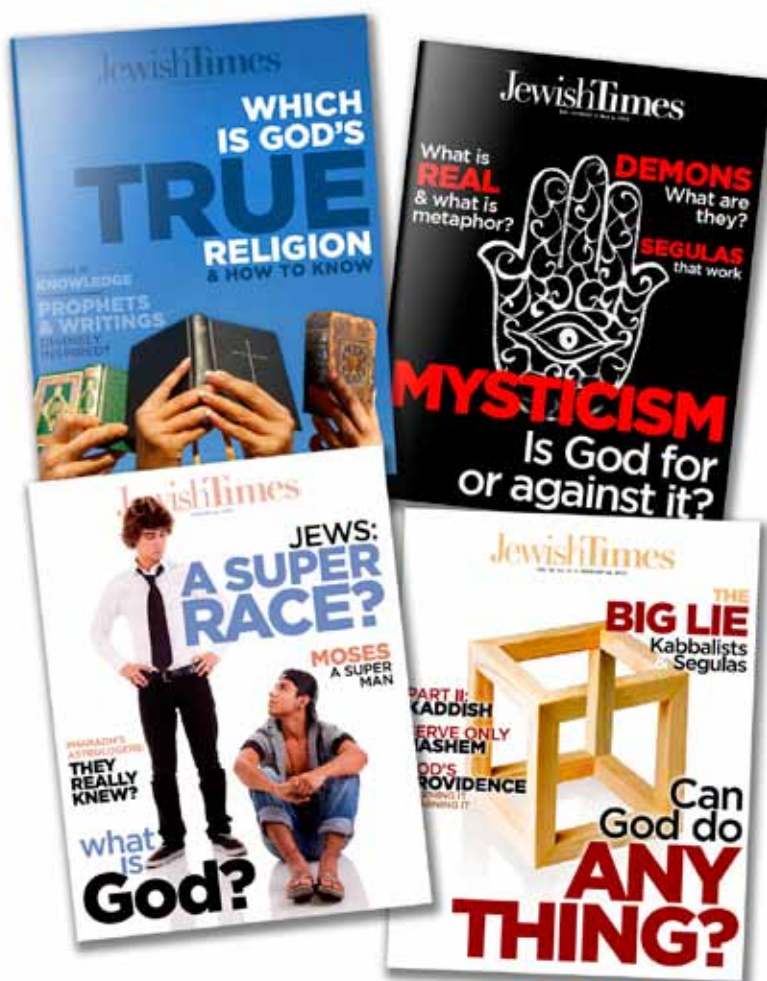
Page 5

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LETTERS

Why is a Jew Any Better?

Reader: What makes a Jew any better? A Jew prays to God, and so do Christians and Muslims! Why can't we all just let each other live as we each want. Why do we say in the future everyone will follow the Torah?

Rabbi: First of all, it's not the "Jew" who is better...it is "Judaism" that is better. All humans are created equal. In fact, Judaism's leading patriarch Abraham was not a Jew. He was as gentile as were Adam, Eve, Noah, his children, and all

others prior to Sinai. All people come from Adam. All people are born equal.

The difference lies in Judaism vs. all other religions. All other religions possess no proof for their claims of divine origin. Either you believe in those religions or you do not. But you will never obtain proof. This means you can be living a lie by following the notions and tenets of all other religions. In other areas of your life you seek proof, like receiving a paycheck for your labor, and that you'll receive a degree for

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your studies. So why accept anything less when it comes to your relationship to God? Shouldn't this area be MORE important, requiring proof, not just simple blind faith? Of course it does. And don't be misled that the other religions have so many books. The fact something is written or that it is found in "ancient" books, does not in any way make the words truths.

You must face the glaring fact that each religion rejects the others. They each clearly state that by following their religion, you must reject the other religions. Since this is so, you cannot hold of your original opinion to defend "all" religions, since by doing so, you are forced to reject them. Meaning, accepting Christianity requires you to reject Judaism and Islam. So you cannot defend all religions, as you said. And be mindful that as all people are created equal, it is nonsensical that there should be "many" religions. There are not "many" mankind. Since we all possess the same design, it makes sense that there is one best way to live, for us all.

What makes Judaism the only true religion?

It was the event of God communicating with us. God never communicated with any other people, and He says He won't. God gave religion to the Jews alone. He also said not to change this Torah at all, thereby making all other religions a lie, and a sin against God. I won't go into why the other religions sinned this way. I wish only to answer your question, how we know Judaism is the only religion.

God gave this Torah on Mount Sinai to the assembly of the 2.5 million Jews who left Egypt, the descendants of Jacob, in the year 2448 as we count today as year 5773. In fact, Christianity and Islam do not argue on this; and they cannot, as this is world history.

Mankind today knows this event of God talking to the Jewish nation is true. How is this proved? The proof is in the very existence of this verbally transmitted story. Had Moses lied, and the Jewish people did not witness a mountain on fire where all 2.5 million heard God's words from inside the

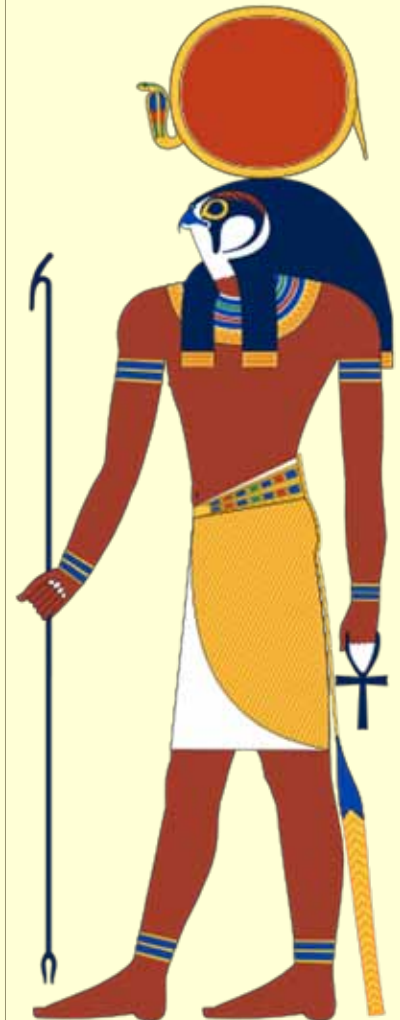
fire, the people would not accept they experienced it. And they would not abandon their real history, and transmit Moses' lies, had Moses actually lied. This would be equivalent to my claim today, that this morning, martians in spaceships gave me tablets on the George Washington Bridge, and 1000s of people there saw this. If I told anyone they saw this with me, they would say I am crazy. Every person knows they didn't see this. If I tell the news, they will ask me where these other 1000s of witnesses are. So you see, this martian story will never get started, and certainly will not become the singular history of the Jews 3000 years from now, also accepted by all major religions. The only way there is one Jewish history today, also accepted worldwide, is because God did in fact communicate with the Jews back then. There is no way this story of God's revelation on Sinai exists today as the only Jewish history, and accepted worldwide...other than the fact that it's true. If it didn't happen, we would have at least one more alternate Jewish history. But we do not. If Sinai did not take place, there is no way Moses could have gotten the Jewish nation and the world to accept this lie, instead of their true history.

But you'll ask, don't the other religions have wider acceptance than us? The answer is that wider acceptance does not make a story true. It merely indicates how appealing their stories are. Christianity's claim that "Jesus died for you sins," is very appealing! "God became a man," is an exciting fairy tale! The same with Islam. But no religion claims supernatural events witnessed by large crowds. You cannot get masses to lie. So their stories do not have any claim that large crowds witnessed any event of God's communication with them. Had they tried to perpetrate such a lie to initiate their religion, or at any time, the masses would reject such an outright lie. This is why no other religion contains any claim of God's communicating to the masses, like we find in the Jewish history.

Judaism is thereby proven, and all other religions are exposed as lies. Therefore, to suggest that Judaism is equal to other religions, is false. Other religions change God's words, so they sin against God, and

their religions are therefore corrupt. It must be harmful to follow their religions, additionally, as their ideas violate God's prohibitions of idolatry, and who His selected nation truly is. Christianity and Islam claim matters in God's name that make them heresy.

This is why God says in the future, all nations and religions will finally say, "Our fathers bequeathed lies to us, futility that offers no help (Jer. 16:19)." ■



Eli's Great Insights

Rabbi: For many years, I've been davening next to my young friend Eli each Friday night. He has gotten so used to me asking him a Parsha question, that he now beats me to the punch and initiates: "So...what's the question of the week?" Last week I responded: "Eli, in Devarim 17:6, why is the warning against idolatry regarding the sun, moon and stars, and not other forms?" Eli delighted me with an insightful response:

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"Well, the sun, moon and stars are far away. Maybe the fact that we can't control them, we think they are stronger, so people bow to them. They also move and also give light...they have power. Didn't the Egyptians bow to Ra, the sun god?"

Eli hit the nail on the head. In fact, Ra was the main god of Egypt. People tend to first deify objects less under their control. This explains why Rambam classifies idolatry as "Star Worship." For stars and the heavenly bodies were the first objects man deified and prayed to. Therefore, God teaches us of our idolatrous frailties by initially warning against heavenly bodies. Man's insecurities first propel him to seek shelter, but then he errs in his selection of a protector. His sensual makeup drive him to find a sensual protector, physical beings. Then he selects those objects he imagines are the greatest, the heavenly bodies.

Nice job Eli! ■

Mustn't God be Physical?

Reader: You cannot move an object without touching it. To run a physical world, doesn't God have to be physical? I mean, how can He "push" or steer (affect) the physical universe otherwise?

Rabbi: There is an order to asking questions. Meaning, if one question is based on the answer to another question, that other question should be answered first. For example, if someone asks how to create a house with flat floors, he must first know how to create flat floor boards. So the first question he should ask is "How do I create flat floor boards?" Only then is he ready to learn how to position these boards in a manner that creates a flat floor throughout the house.

With regard to the universe, we must first ask about the "creation" of matter, before

asking about moving that matter.

We must first agree to this: matter cannot create itself. For if someone assumes matter did in fact create itself, there are 2 obvious rejections: 1) if the matter does not yet exist, there is nothing there to perform creation; 2) if the matter already exists, it did nothing by creating itself. Either way, matter cannot create itself.

Now, this is true not only regarding a single item, but this applies to all matter. Next, once we say all matter did not create itself, yet it still exists! We ask, "What created it?" We are forced to say, "Something other than physical matter caused Creation of the universe." For if we say "Some other matter created the universe", we must ask on that thing, "What created that other matter?" We will never find the true Creator, if we suggest it is physical. For if we keep going back in time, saying Z was created by Y, and Y was created by X, and was created by W, etc...we never arrive at a "cause" for the universe. Yet, the universe was caused, as we explained at the very beginning.

We are forced to say there was one Creator that is not physical, and this Creator caused the universe. We don't know how this Creator created, but there is no other possibility.

Now, to answer your question.

The Creator, who is not physical, can do far more than move the universe, despite the truth that He has no physical nature. Think on this: He was able to create the universe. Certainly, He who gave the universe its very existence, can also move that universe, which is a lesser task.

God willed the universe into existence from nothing. He gave it its most central property: existence. And this He did although He is not physical. This means God controls all creations. Every aspect of matter is due to God's will, whether something is large or small, heavy or light, liquid or solid, with a soul or without, permanent or temporary. All of these properties came into existence through God's will alone. Therefore, with His will alone, He guides the universe. ■

How the Frum Destroy Jews

Rabbi: I continue to learn about Jews that are turned off to Judaism because of the forced approach of "Frum" Yeshivos. Instead of explaining the philosophy behind davening, shabbos, mitzvos, niddah, and kosher, Yeshivos drill students to memorize numerous laws, against which students naturally rebel. By the time students leave Yeshiva high schools, they leave Judaism too. They were not given any reason and philosophy for the mitzvos, leaving them with a giant, painful meaningless burden that is so easy to cast off their backs for a free life of pleasure. Who wouldn't rebel! The students are not to blame. Then comes the task of trying to open these young Jews' hearts and minds to hearing the truly pleasant explanations for our Torah, after they tasted bitter waters of the Frum oppressive approach.

It is vital that Torah be taught in a manner where the students' minds are engaged, where their questions are encouraged, and where they are consistently complimented. Teachers must follow the minds and questions of the students. In this manner, students will yearn to learn.

Teachers at all levels must be excited themselves at the profound Torah insights waiting to be discovered, and shared. Only once a Rebbe or teacher has discovered sound reasons and delightful insights, should they teach. But to teach dry facts, laws and obligations, you will turn off Jews, not turn them on.

A child enters the world with natural curiosity. It is the teachers' and parents' obligation to nurture this nature, not destroy what could be a life of continued interest and adherence to God and His Torah. ■

True Compassion



This week's Parsha, Ki Tetze, contains a very unique mitzvah, Shiluach Hakein (sending away the mother). This refers to a situation when one is on the road and chances upon a bird's nest with the mother hovering over her chicks. If the person desires to take the chicks, he must first send away the mother, and then he may take the chicks. While this may sound like a small matter, it is of great significance. The Torah, in general, does not mention the specific reward for the various mitzvot. There are two exceptions to this rule: that of honoring one's parent and sending away the mother. In both cases, the reward is "that it will be good for you and you will have length of days." The Rabbis interpret this as not being limited to only well-being and longevity in this world. They said that the reward alludes to the "world which is completely good" and the "life which is completely long," i.e., eternal life in the world to come. Given the supreme importance of honoring one's parents, we can easily see why great reward attaches to this mitzvah. However, the mitzvah of Shiluach Hakein does not appear as significant and compelling. Yet, the Torah ascribes great significance to it. What is the secret of this commandment?

The Rambam discusses this in his Guide for the Perplexed where he seeks to provide the reasons for all of the commandments. A major goal of the Torah, he says, is to uproot cruelty from our hearts and imbue us with a sense of compassion. Of course, the primary objects of our compassion should be fellow humans. However, we must be kind and caring to animals, as well. Thus, the Torah mandates that while we are permitted to eat meat the manner of killing must be humane. If one comes upon an ox which has fallen under its load, he may not ignore the calamity and move on. He is obligated to remove the burden from the animal so that it does not remain in a state of pain. Indeed, one who has pets must afford them good care and may not eat his meal before he has fed them. The Rambam explains that we are prohibited from slaughtering an animal and its young on the same day, so that the offspring should not be killed in the sight of the mother. He says, "For the pain of the animals under such circumstances is very great. There is no difference in this case between the pain of man and the pain of other living beings, since the love and tenderness of the mother for her young ones is not produced by reasoning, but by imagination and this faculty exists not only in man, but in

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most living beings.” He goes on to say, “The same reason applies to the law which enjoins that we should let the mother fly away when we take the young so that she does not see the taking of the young and does not feel any pain.” The Rambam then adds a striking thought. “If the Torah provides that such grief should not be caused to cattle or birds how much more careful must we be not to cause grief to our fellow man?”

We can now understand the lesson contained in the great mitzvah of Shiluach Hakein. There are two different kinds of compassion. The most common form is that which is motivated by identification with the plight of the sufferer. People tend to get involved with causes because of some personal connection. Those who have experienced a certain disease or have friends or relatives who succumbed to it, tend to become involved in organizations dedicated to fighting that malady. The reason they choose to become involved in this cause, as opposed to many other equally vital ones, is purely personal and selfish. Since this problem involves them, they identify with it. I do not use the word selfish, here, in a negative way. There is nothing wrong with practicing compassion because of subjective considerations and whatever kindness one performs is a great mitzvah.

The Torah teaches that there is a higher level of chesed i.e., that which is based on love of the Creator and consideration for the living beings He has fashioned. This type of compassion is not founded on an emotional response, but on a finely honed awareness of pains and sufferings to which all creatures are vulnerable. Any form of suffering bothers Him and he seeks the well-being of the entire creation. Such a person is truly humble for he does not put his own pain above that of any other creature. He possesses true compassion and is a genuine servant of Hashem, and he, therefore, deserves a good and lengthy life in this world and the next. May we merit to attain it.

Shabbat Shalom. ■

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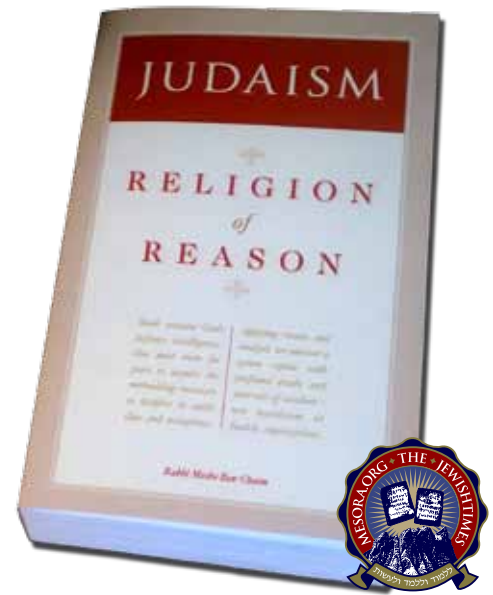
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REVIEWS



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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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

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