PASSOVER ISSUE

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Silver & Treasures The Rabbi's Message

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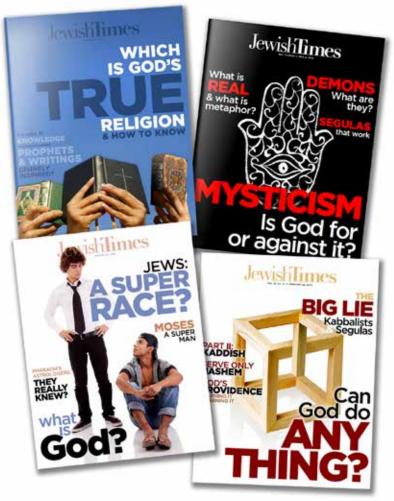
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To arrive at Torah's astonishing insights, our attitude towards Torah study must be demanding, dilligent and disastified with anything mediocre.

LETTERS

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

Bitachon

Reader: If Emuna comes from reason, where does Bitachon comes from? Is it an "upgrade" of Emuna?

Rabbi: "Emuna" or conviction (as in "amen" said after hearing a blessing) as you said, is based on reason. We respond "amen" (this is true) to one who blesses God for any of His various gifts. We thereby testify to our conviction in this truth of God's kindness. (CONT. ON NEXT PAGE)



We are convinced of a given point when either, it complies with with reason, we experienced it, or it is based in God's Torah, as Maimonides taught. "Bitachon" or trust does not exclusively concern reason, for it concerns God's word and His promises. God is not confined to how our minds work, or natural law that He controls. For example, we are "convinced" that 2+2=4, but we "trust" God's promises, as in His rewarding our good deeds; viz., that charity enriches us, although we don't understand how diminishing wealth actually enriches us.

One does not have bitachon about a witnessed event; one has conviction. But even though bitachon concerns God's promises, it is not devoid of reason, since all Torah finds its basis in Revelation at Sinai, which is undisputed truth. Thus, we are convinced that Revelation occurred, and therefore we trust in all of God's words that form part of His Torah communication.

Conviction concerns intelligence and reasoned truths.

Bitachon concerns our beliefs and actual response to God's promises.

Kabbala vs. Prophets

Reader: What is the distinction between Kabbalistic works (Zohar, Tanya, etc.) and Prophets and Writings, that you claim the former possess flaws?

Rabbi: Kabbalistic writings are not Divinely inspired, but are man-made and thus, they are subject to human error. In contrast, Prophets and Writings are God's communications through the Prophets. The tendency to deify authors of Kabbalistic is the source of the error, to view such writings as infallible. Jewish communities promote Rebbe worship, or Tzaddik worship, like Christian saints. People have become overly attached to man, and are less attached to God and His words. King Solomon rejects such deification of man, "For man is not righteous in the land who performs good and does not sin (Ecclesiastes, 7:20)." These are the words of the second wisest man to have ever lived. Yet, Jews today prefer to endorse a contrary view in order that they might feel there is an infallible rebbe or Tzaddik, to save them. Their personal desires for wealth, health, a shidduch or other needs drive them to deify flawed humans to lead them. and many times, these Rabbis rob misguided Jews, lying to them and creating the worst Chillul Hashem. Deifying authors of Kabbala by claiming their writings are without flaw is merely another expression of human worship, again violating King Solomon's words.

It's crucial that your goal be to validate "ideas", not the author. That's the purpose and primary function of the intellect. Intelligence distinguishes truths from falsehoods, not one author from another. This being the case, it is clear that God's will is that man distinguish truth from fallacy, and abandon human deification. And if one reads in any work, regardless of the author, that there is a piece of God in a human, he must dismiss such heresy as this violates reason, and God's words to Moses, the Prophets and Writings.

The Evil Eye

Reader: What do you think of the ability for one person to harm another by using the "Evil Eye"?

Rabbi: The understanding most people

have is that the Evil Eye is some power one possesses to hurt another. But we must ask, as one is not born displaying such powers, at what point, and through what mechanism is this power acquired? What are the limitations of such power? These questions unveil this understanding to be fallacy.

The Rabbis referred to the Evil Eye as a person who will "look" (eye) viciously at others, suspect others, and cause unfair harm due to their "actions", not mere sight. Such actions are evoked through jealousy, competition, or other infantile emotions. The Rabbis and intelligent people know there are no powers man possesses other than his muscular strength. This is why God commands us to kill a witch or warlock: as their professed abilities are false, and more so, as they obscure God as the sole power in the universe, they must be killed. But not because they possess any ability at all. The Hebrew term for witch is "mach'shayfa", which the Talmud teaches is an acronym for conflicting with heaven (God). Ironically, if the witch had real powers, why can she not save herself from the death penalty? How can God even say she must be put to death, if this is impossible? The same can be said of the Evil Eye practitioner. Additionally, no evidence exists for either.

On a fundamental level, God's system of justice, or Reward and Punishment, demands that only evil people are punished. Thus, for God to have created a power where infantile people can vent their jealousy and harm innocents, Reward and Punishment would have to be rejected. But, as we know Reward and Punishment is a perfect and just system, as our brilliant founder Abraham expressed, where only man is ignorant of God's complete control and justice, we conclude from reason and from evidence that the Evil Eye, as is understood, is a fallacy. ■

PASSOVER

From Slavery to True Freedom

Rabbi Reuven Mann

Popular and observed event on the Jewish religious calendar. Its significance is not restricted to Jews. Many Gentiles will conduct their own version of a seder (Passover meal) or seek to be included in a Jewish one. What is so special about this holiday and its rituals that makes it so widely celebrated?

Freedom is the basic theme of Passover. Contemporary society is obsessed with the idea that people should have the right to live as they please, without external restraints. Thus, nothing is more abhorrent than the enslavement of man. It is unfortunate that basic human freedoms are denied in numerous parts of the world. Many nations are governed by corrupt dictators, especially those who adhere to a harsh religious agenda. However, the internet has brought the Western idea of human dignity to all corners of the earth. It is only a matter of time until the citadels of oppression are torn down.

The basic mitzvah (commandment) of the seder is to recount what happened to our ancestors in Egypt a few thousand years ago. The narration incorporates the enslavement, oppression, and subsequent liberation of the Jews. We tell the story using "multimedia." In addition to verbally recounting the major events by reading selected texts, we also act out various aspects of the saga by eating symbolic foods, drinking wine, and reclining as a demonstration of freedom.

The key element in fulfilling the mitzvah of telling the story of the Exodus is questioning. The seder is geared toward children, whose curiosity should be aroused so they are motivated to ask questions. Judaism is a religion based on ideas, whose most exalted form of divine service is intensive learning.

The seder is a celebration of the holiness of questioning, offering opinions, and broadening one's understanding. That is why the seder is a social experience that should encourage all the participants, especially the youth, to express themselves.

One may ask, Why is all this sophisticated educational technique necessary? Why would it not be enough to give a brief, concise review of the basic story of the Jews' history in Egypt and then proceed to a festive meal?

I believe the answer is that the purpose of the seder is not merely to refresh our memory of an ancient historical event. There is a very pertinent statement in the Haggadah (text of the seder): "In every generation, a person is obliged to view it as though he himself had experienced the slavery of Egypt and was liberated"!

The uniqueness of the Passover drama is embodied in the first of the 10 commandments, which proclaims, "I am the L-rd your G-d, who took you out of the land of Egypt from the house of slaves." This is not merely a statement about history, but a command to recognize the Creator of the universe, who performed all the miracles that broke Pharaoh's spirit and liberated us from his enslavement.

The experience of yetziat mitzrayim (exodus from Egypt) is the foundation of our obligation to accept the yoke of the Kingdom of Heaven, that is, to be Jews who serve Hashem by keeping His Torah. Thus, it is not enough to merely review the Exodus as a historical event. Every one of us is obligated to view it "as though he himself was a slave in Egypt and was redeemed."

Each Jew received his personal freedom on the night of the redemption. That redemption means accepting Hashem as our G-d and committing ourselves to His Torah. On that transformative evening, we ceased being slaves to Pharaoh and became servants of Hashem. And that is the meaning of true freedom.

Shabbat shalom and chag kasher v'sameach!



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Plague of the Firstborn Deaths

Ibn Ezra: Distinctions in the 10 Plagues REVEALING DESIGNS

Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim

bn Ezra directs our attention to the performers of the Ten Plagues (Exod. 8:12):

"Know, that by the hand of Aaron were the first three plagues and these signs were in the lower matter as I explained earlier, because two (of them) were in water, and the third was in the dust of the earth. And the plagues performed by Moses with the staff were in the higher elements, just as his (Moses) status was higher than Aaron's status. For example, the plague of hail and locusts were brought by the wind, and (so too) the darkness, it was in the air; also the plague of boils was through him (Moses). Only three (plagues) were without the staff; the wild animals, the disease of the animals, and the death of the firstborns. And one (plague) with no staff was through Moses, with a little connection with Aaron, and it was the plague of boils."

Ibn Ezra grabs our attention by his first word, "Know", which urges the reader to think into this specific commentary. He intimates that there is more here than meets the eye. What is he driving at? He does not simply list each plague with its performer, or describe the involvement of the staff. We are not interested in dry statistics when studying God's wisdom. Here, Ibn Ezra is teaching important principles. Beginning with the word "Know", Ibn Ezra is teaching an important lesson.

Each of the Ten Plagues was used as a tool to teach Egypt and the world the following: 1) Aaron and Moses were each assigned specific plagues, in the lower and higher realms respectively, and they performed a similar number of plagues independently, 2) The staff was present in only certain miracles, 3) Moses joined with Aaron in a single plague of boils, 4) God distinguished between Egypt and the Jews through two plagues, in which no staff was used, and which was placed in the center of the series of plagues.

In his Laws of Idolatry, 1:1, Maimonides teaches that early man already began projecting greatness onto the heavenly bodies. Man thought, since the planets, stars and spheres "minister before God", they too are worthy of man's honor. Eventually, man's corrupt thinking and sin increased as he replaced simple honor of stars with his worship of them as deities, until God was no longer recognized. Star worship reveals man's false estimation that the heavens deserve to be worshipped. Man feared not only the spheres, but also the heavens. Jeremiah 10:2-3 reads, "So says God, 'To the ways of the nations do not learn, and from the signs of the heavens do not fear, because from them the nations fear. Because the statutes of the peoples are false, because a tree from the forest they cut, fashioned by an artisan with an adze." Jeremiah teaches that man did in fact fear the heavens. But their fear stemmed from a false projection - not based in reality. Jeremiah's lesson is insightful: he equates the fear of heavens with the

(CONT. ON PAGE 9)

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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

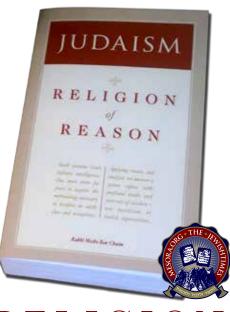
contemporary; insightful analyses of Biblical narratives as well as the significance of many mitzvot. Rabbi Ben-Chaim demonstrates that Judaism can be harmonized with human reason. He is not afraid to ask the most penetrating and challenging questions as he is convinced that Torah is the Word of God 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 contradic-tion 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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Red Bendels Kabbala Miracles What is God? "Jewish" Souls **Talmudic Stories Metaphors Belief vs. Proof Do Rabbis Err? Gentile Equality** Man's Purpose



idolatrous practice of prostrating to wooden idols. He wished to teach that the heavens do not hold any greater powers than wooden sculptures. Man's idolatrous emotions project the same imagined authority onto both, the heaven and the trees. But the underlying message is that man does in fact ascribe greater veneration to the skies, as Maimonides taught above. It appears that based on man's first error that God occupies space and lives in the skies, man erred again, ascribing greatness to the spheres and stars that are assumed to be "in close proximity" to God.

The primitive view of the heavens determining man's fate, was not alien to the Egyptians. God corrected this error with one aspect of His plagues. Commanding Aaron to perform the plagues limited to the earthly realm, and Moses to perform those of the "higher", heavenly realm, God discounted the dangerous esteem man held towards the heavens. God showed that the only difference between the heavens and Earth is the level of understanding required to comprehend their natures, as the wiser man - Moses · addressed the heavenly plagues, and Aaron addressed the earthly plagues. Laws control both realms, and both could be understood. Understanding a phenomenon removes one's false, mystical estimations. Realizing they are 'guided' means they are subordinate to something greater. These realms did not "control", but were "controlled", teaching the Egyptians that their views were false.

The Egyptians erred by assuming that the heavens were a governing and mystical realm. God corrected this disproportionately high, heavenly grandeur. God did so in two ways: 1) by showing the heavens' subordination to a Higher will, God demoted heaven's status from the divine to the mundane, and, 2) by aligning the plagues with Moses' and Aaron's participation, Egypt would understand that not only are the heaven's not divine, but they are in equal realms (created and subordinate entities), just as Moses and Aaron are equally human. Additionally, Moses and Aaron each performed three miracles independently to equate heaven and earth, dispelling a false supremacy of heaven and meteorological phenomena. Hopefully, the Egyptians would comprehend that both heaven and Earth are equally under God's control, as Jeremiah intimated, and that neither one is significantly greater. Egypt would then realize that Something higher was responsible for all creation. God wanted the good for the Egyptians. The 'good' means knowledge of what is true. As it says in the

Torah (Exod. 9:16) with regards to these plagues, "...in order that they tell of My name in the whole world."

Interestingly, the three plagues designed in the heavens were hail, locusts and darkness. Why these three? Perhaps to address three errors of the Egyptians. Egypt assumed meteorological phenomena to be divine, so God responded with a hail/fire plague to display His exclusive control in this area. Wind was also a heavenly phenomena, but now they experienced an unnatural wind blowing the entire day, the entire night, until the next morning when it delivered the terror of locusts destroying all vegetation remaining of the hail's previous destruction (Exod 10:13). Finally, with the plague of darkness, God displayed control over the primary focus in heaven - the sun. Weather, the atmosphere and outer space were all shown as false deities and under the exclusive control of Israel's God. Additionally, the plague of "darkness" had one other facet - it was palpable, perhaps to show that it was not a simple solar eclipse.

Ibn Ezra also made specific note of two plagues where no staff was used. These two also included the lesson of national distinction: Exod. 8:18, "And I will distinguish on

that day the land of Goshen that My people stand on it, to prevent from being there the wild beasts..." Exod. 9:4, "And God will distinguish between the cattle of Israel and the cattle of Egypt, and nothing will die of the Israelites." Why were both of these plagues designed to distinguish Egypt Israel? from I believe the answer is that by designing not just one plague which could be viewed as a freak incident, but two which plagues differentiated "Egyptians" and "Jews" - the goal

of the complete universe: the first three plagues showed His control of the Earth, the last three over the heavens, and the middle three displayed His control over man, meaning an expression of justice: only Egypt's population was attacked by animals, only their herds were killed, and their astrologers were exposed as charlatans when they cold not remove boils from their own bodies.

God displayed His control

was to teach that God works differently than Egypt's view of the 'divine'. The Egyptians thought that to please their gods was man's correct obligation, and precisely how gods

operated - a natural outgrowth of a child/parent relationship. How would such an infantile idea be corrected in order to teach God's true system? By Egypt witnessing punitive measures only on their 'side of the river', they were awakened to a new idea: objective morality. They were held accountable. They also realized something even more essential: their relationship to their gods was one where their gods benefited from man's actions. Egypt felt that their gods need man to serve their needs, which were projections of man's own needs. But Judaism teaches that relating to God is not for God, but truly only for man. God does not need man. Man cannot affect God, as if God does not previously know our actions. Man must do that which is proper for himself, and if he does not, he will not only be punished, but he will lose the true good for himself. The Egyptian's exclusive receipt of these two plagues - a system of "reward and punishment" - awoke them to a realization that service of God means not catering to a god's needs, but rather, an alignment with proper ideals and morality. This is a drastic difference from Egypt's primitive notion of worship and pleasing their gods.

Simultaneously, these two plagues attacked the very core of Egyptian gods; animals.

Their own animals died, and then, wild animals attacked them. It was a devastating blow to their esteemed deities. Their deification of animal gods was destroyed. Pharaoh's response (Exod. 8:21), "sacrifice to your God" confirms his lowered estimation of animals, to the that point he encourages Moses to slaughter them, and to do so to his God. In other cases, Pharaoh does gesture to free the Jews, but only here in connection with the animal plagues does Pharaoh say

"sacrifice to your God." I believe the Torah includes these words of Pharaoh to inform us that the plague had the desired effect on Pharaoh. God understands what will affect





man, and so it does. The Egyptians were all the more confused when they saw that Israel was not affected, even though they did not serve animals. In Exod. 9:7, Pharaoh himself sends messengers to see if Israel was harmed. This plague of the animal's death concerned him greatly.

God displayed His control of the complete universe: the first three plagues showed His control of the Earth, the last three over the heavens, and the middle three displayed His control over man, meaning an expression of justice: only Egypt's population was attacked by animals, only their herds were killed, and their astrologers were exposed as charlatans when they cold not remove boils from their own bodies.

Perhaps the staff is not employed in these three plagues, since these were more clearly God's measures of justice, distinguishing Egypt from Israel as the verses state. As such, human participation through directing these plagues (the staff) would suggest God does not exact justice alone. Therefore, God did not instruct Moses or Aaron to employ the staff in these three plagues. God must be viewed as the only one who determines man's justice.

An additional reason suggests itself why these two animal plagues were bereft of the staff. Perhaps the staff carried with it some element of cause and effect; man would hit something, and only then would the plague commence. Perhaps, God wished to teach that He is in no way bound by the physical. A plague may occur with no prior cause. Removing the staff might effectively teach this lesson, as nothing was smitten to bring on these plagues.

I heard another explanation for the use of the staff: Although God did not need it (He needs nothing) for Moses and Aaron to initiate the plagues, it's presence was to remove any divinity projected by Egypt onto Moses and Aaron, lest onlookers falsely believe these two mortals possessed some powers. The staff might have been employed as a redirecting agent, a pointer. By seeing the staff incorporated into the miracles, Moses' and Aaron's significance was diluted in Egypt's eyes. But wouldn't people then believe the staff to have those powers? I believe for fear of this erroneous notion, God created a miracle where the staff itself turned into a snake. This was to show that it too was under the control of God. Had there been no use of a staff, focus would have remained on the announcers of the plagues (Moses and Aaron) thereby deifying man, not God. But I feel the first possibility is most correct, i.e., that God must be viewed as the sole cause of human justice.

Why did the plague of boils require Moses and Aaron to work together? My friend Jessie Fischbein made a sharp observation. She said that just as Moses and Aaron addressed the higher and lower forms of matter in their respective plagues, the plague of boils executed by both Moses and Aaron included the higher and lower matter: ashes from Earth, and they were commanded to be thrown towards the heavens (Exod. 9:8). Her parallel revealed another facet of the boils, as God's plagues contain many strata of insights. I believe the boils' combination of realms was to teach that heaven and Earth do not operate in two separate, encapsulated systems. The very act of throwing ashes towards the heavens teaches that both Earth and heaven work together. This was a necessary lesson in the reduction of the heaven's exaggerated status. By showing this further idea that the heavens participate in earthly phenomena, the heavens' false, divine status was stripped that much further. Just as his subjects will view a king who spends time with commoners in a less regal light, so too the heavens now lost their reputation by participating in Earthly matters. Moses could have collected the ashes himself, but by working with Aaron, together, they underlined this point.

One question remains: Why are the two animal-related plagues placed in the middle of the series of the Ten Plagues? Perhaps, as these plagues specifically intended to distinguish Egypt from Israel, the evildoers from the victims, this theme of "justice" is placed smack in the middle of the set of 10 Plagues. Thereby, justice emerges as a highlighted message of all the plagues. A story or a dinner does not commence with the primary plot or the guest of honor ... in both they are placed at the midway point. Here too, perhaps God placed His plagues of justice in the midway point of all the plagues, to underline the theme that all the plagues were in fact an expression of justice, not viciousness.

PASSOVER

The Meaning of Life

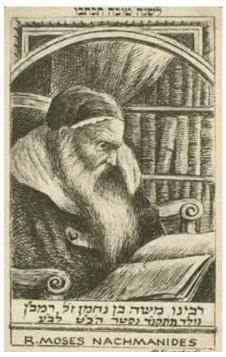
Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim

n preparation for Passover, my close friend Howard and I studied a Ramban on Exodus, 13:16. Although midstream through this particular commentary, Ramban says he will "Now tell us a rule in the reasons of the commandments", he offers a great deal more that I can share. I feel his words addressing the reasons behind certain plagues will enhance our appreciation for the purpose of Passover in general.

Ramban commences with a brief history of three errors man committed in his knowledge of God, and says that the Egyptians partook of these three: 1) the Earth is eternal and there is no God; 2) God cannot know man's actions; and 3) God does not intervene with mankind, and thus, there is no reward or punishment. Ramban continues, stating that when God creates a miracle or a wonder changing natural law with individuals or nations, these three opinions become nullified:

"For a wondrous miracle teaches that the world has a Creator, Who created it anew, and He knows all, and He guides this world, and He possesses full capabilities. And when this miracle was forecasted by a prophet, it is furthered clarified that prophecy is true, for God speaks to man and reveals His principles to His servants the prophets, and thereby, the entire Torah is [also] proven."

This all makes perfect sense. For when a miracle occurs, it teaches us that an intelligent Being exists, which controls the laws we witness. These laws governing nature have a design; something is forcing their repeated behavior. The idea of the true God,



the Creator, is proven through a miracle: this Creator is responsible for the behavior - and thus creation - of these laws, for these laws only operate because an external force limits them to this select behavior. We also learn that a miracle, a change at a precise "time", means by definition, that God is in fact intervening and guiding His created world. Third, we learn that God is not restrained by anything, and is in complete, exclusive control. Prophecy is also proven when the miracle is forecasted; for how else can a human know when a suspension in natural law will occur? And once prophecy is proven, the entire Torah that was given by God to man with prophecy, is thereby sustained.

How God Addresses Man's Denial

Ramban continues to explain three verses found in connection with the Egyptian plagues. Exodus 8:18 reads, "And I will distinguish on that day the land of Goshen on which My people stand, that there shall be no wild beasts there, in order that you know that I am God in the midst of the land." God teaches that He does in fact intervene; He punishes one people while saving the other: "I will distinguish." Thereby, God removes one of the errors listed above. God proves He is truly "in the midst of the land" and relates to, and judges man.

Exodus 9:29 reads, "And Moses said to him [Pharaoh] when I leave the city, I will spread my palms to God; the voices will cease and the hail will not continue anymore, in order that you shall know that the Earth is God's." Ramban says these words "you shall know that the Earth is God's" teach that God created the Earth. As we explained, only the One responsible for putting laws into motion may be the One who suspends or alters them. Hail also displayed God's complete control over the heavens and not just the Earth alone. Hail commenced the third set of the plagues, now educating mankind on God's reign over the heavens. The Plagues display God's exclusive control over all creation. The first three plagues displayed God's reign over the Earth, as Blood, Lice and Frogs all emanated from the ground. The second three plagues displayed God's control of man, as He says He distinguishes the Jews from the Egyptians in Animal Mixture, Animal Deaths, and in Boils when Egyptian astrologers in particular are singled-out. The last three, Hail, Locusts and Darkness displayed God's control over the heavens and atmosphere. Earth, the heavens and man (Reward & Punishment) were thereby shown to be under God's hand.

The last verse Ramban quotes is Exodus 9:14, "For in this time, I send all My plagues to your heart, and in your servants and in your people, so that you shall know that there is none like Me in all the land." Ramban teaches that with this plague of Hail, God will be viewed as omnipotent, thereby removing the notion that anything else exists that interferes with His will. No other powers exist. Why does God say He will send all His plagues to "Pharaoh's heart, and in his servants and in his people"? Why not group them all together? Perhaps God is indicating from 'where' the notions arise, that there are other forces besides Him: it stems from "each man's individual wishes." By stating that he will affect each Egyptian's heart, God means to indicate that other powers have no reality,

(CONT. ON NEXT PAGE)



other than in "each man's heart." He cannot simply affect Egypt, as there is no one source of idolatrous notion. The source is in "each and every individual" who creates his own wishes, and assumes new gods or powers to exist, which will cater to those wishes. Thus, God says he will affect "each" man.

Ramban is teaching us that God's very words in Exodus were directed at the primary confusions, which plagued man since the time of Enosh, Adam's grandson. Man's mind had become confused, and he made a few central errors about God's existence. His abilities and His knowledge. These verses address these precise faulty notions. Ramban tells us that so important are these ideas, that Chametz and the Passover sacrifice are met with excision if violated. So important are these concepts, these absolute truths, that we reiterate them in Mezuza, the Shema, Tefillin and through Succah. Many other commands as well are "Remembrances of the Egyptian Exodus" because they teach these fundamental ideas concerning God. Ramban goes out of his way to again list in this commentary these fundamentals proven by miracles: Proof of God's act of Creation; God's knowledge; His providence over mankind; Prophecy; the truth of the entire Torah; and also, that God's mercy extends to those who fulfill His will, as we see He saved those Jews who killed Egypt's God - the Paschal lamb - and circumcised themselves at His command.

The Meaning of Life

As if we have already been sufficiently overwhelmed by such enlightenment, Ramban introduces an even greater concept. He states the reason for "The Initial Creation":

"We must know that God created us, and this is the purpose of creation. For there is no other reason for the Initial Creation, and there is no desire in God for man except this; that man should know, and thank His God that He created him."

Many ask what is the meaning of life. Ramban answers: we are to know God, and thank Him that he created us. We are to realize what we suppress. For when one realizes he is created, his own wishes must be subjugated to God's commands. It is a most profound and emotionally impacting idea, to reflect on the conviction that "I am created." This is no small idea, and not one to be passed by. It takes time to digest. After all, we have been "free" to live, as we desire all our lives. But to confront this truth, that once, we were not here, and that "God made me" is both a humble experience, but a liberating one. It liberates us from the bondage of our own fallacies, and allows us to live perfectly in line with God's plan, which means we will achieve greater satisfaction, as we no longer combat a truth, which only seemed restrictive. This truth that we are "created", will most certainly allow us to live in line with truth. And when one lives with truth, and does not follow his own agenda, then he also lives in line with God's plan, and this must infinitely surpass our imagined happiness, and enable the best experience for man.

Rabbi Reuven Mann asked, "Is this an ends, or a means? Is man to simply arrive at this knowledge that he is created and thank God for it, and that's it - he need not move any further with life?" Rabbi Mann answered that this realization that we are created beings, is perhaps the beginning, not the end of the line. Meaning, once man achieves this realization and it is real to him, he is now ready to embark on his true life, where he views the Torah as something he must do, and something he desires to do, as he sees the Torah as God's will, and himself, as God's creation. It is the false view that we are "our own people", ignoring the fact we are created, that causes man to sin, and many of our errors in life. But once man truly accepts himself as a "creation", then his life's perspective is completely changed, and now, he may perceive this existence untainted with personal wishes. He may now approach a Torah lifestyle completely objectively, where all he learns is no longer filtered through his wishes. Now...he finally sees truth.

All is Miracle

Returning to the topic of miracles, Ramban concludes, "man has no portion in Moses' Torah if he does not view everything as a miracle, and nothing is natural". But he qualifies this, "everything is God's decree, whether a righteous man receives reward or an evil man is punished." Of course when a leaf falls from a tree, it is not a miracle, but

natural law, as Maimonides also teaches ("Guide"; Book III, chap. XVII, pp 286-287; Dover ed.). What Ramban addresses here is not natural occurrences, but "man's fate". This, Ramban says man must view as directly from God, "all His ways are just." This means that each and every man and woman obtains what is exactly just for him or her. This too is sensible, as all is in God's control; there is nothing that can prevent God from being completely just, as the prophet says. Maimonides, however, qualifies this, stating that God's involvement in man's life is in proportion to his perfection. Some people enjoy a great amount of God's influence in their lives, while others are far from God, and He is far from them. They are like animals, where each individual member of the species is not under God's influence, but are subject to chance.

The Goal of the Commands

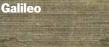
What then is it that Ramban commenced with, a "rule in the reasons of the commands"? It is clear: Ramban is teaching us that the commands have as their goal, our realization that God exists...He is responsible for all, He knows all, and He guides all as exact justice abounds everywhere for everyone. The commands are to enable us to arrive at the most dominant and primary truths about reality. And the best expression that we accept that God is all this, is when we accept that WE are created. It is only at this point that we truly admit of these ideas, when we view our very selves as "created".

What is the purpose of life? To accept with intelligent conviction that this life is created, that all is created, that WE are created, and Who this Creator is. We were given intelligence to arrive at truths...let's not pass by on the most essential truth as Ramban teaches. Let us be fortunate that we came across this Ramban. I truly thank Howard for bringing it to my attention. This is what we should get excited about in life, when we learn profound new ideas that will change us forever.

Happy Passover to everyone.









The Heavens Praise God?

Reader: Dear Rabbi, we read, "Praise Him, the most exalted of the heavens. Let them praise the Name of Hashem, for He commanded and they were created. Praise Hashem from the earth, hail, snow and vapor, fulfilling His word, and the waters that are above the heavens."

How does hail, vapor, rain, and snow speak (vocalize) in order to praise Hashem? Do they praise silently? Is praising, only an anthropomorphic attribute?

Is there a connection between the above guidance with the following: "Praise Hashem all mountains and all hills, fruitful trees, and all cedars, beasts and all cattle, crawling things and winged fowl, Kings of the earth and all governments, princes and all judges on earth, (maybe implying that there are judges above the earth, in heaven) young men and also maidens, old men together with youths. Let them praise the Name of Hashem."

Question: When we enumerate the numerous praisers of God, are we getting credit for each one? What am I missing?

Thank you Rabbi, Chaim **Rabbi:** You are quite correct, and your question comes at an appropriate time, as we sing praises in Hallel to God this passover. King David's intent is that inanimate creations anthropomorphically praise God. How? It is through their very designs and laws that man recognizes the immense brilliance God employed in designing the universe. These inanimate creations attest, or give praise, to God. They each reflect God's great wisdom, and man thereby is the one offering the praise, and sensing an awe of God.

It is fitting that you cite the additional words that conclude with various people praising God, "young men and also maidens, old men together with youths." Perhaps King David included them, to show this very point, that ultimately, praise of God comes from man alone. Man is the only being capable of recognizing God. To omit man from these metaphors, would be an incorrect message, for without man, the universe cannot "praise God."

Finally, as wise Rabbi once taught, man can only praise "the Name of Hashem." This means that man cannot know what God is, so that we might praise Him accurately according to His true essence. "Man cannot know Me while alive." Thus, we can only praise God through His fame, His acts, or His name. But we cannot praise God, for we know not what He truly is.

Matza: You Don't You Don't Know the Whole Story Deciphering God's Clues

Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim



hen studying Passover (Exod. 12), we note its distinction from the other holidays: Passover was celebrated in Egypt. That is, there were "commands" even prior to the giving of the Torah. Today, we reenact those commands in the form of the shank bone, the matza, the bitter herbs, and other laws. Succos and Shavuos are commemorations of God's kindness to us. Passover is as well, but it differs from the other holidays with our pre-Torah, Passover observance in Egypt. Additionally, our adherence to God's commands in Egypt contributed to the holiday's structure: there is only one Succos holiday and one Shavuos. But there are two Passovers: the Passover of Egypt, and all subsequent Passovers. What may we learn from its distinction from the other two holidays? What differences exist between the Passover of Egypt, and our Passover?

Reading the Haggadah, we note a conflict in the identity of the matza. The Haggadah commences by describing the matza as "lachma anya", poor man's bread. The Jews were fed this during their Egyptian bondage. However, later on, the Haggadah, quoting the Talmud Pesachim 116b states that matza is commanded in memory of the dough which did not rise due to the Egyptians' swift, panic-stricken oust of the Jews. (After the Death of Firstborns, the Egyptians panicked, "we are all dead!") We are obligated by Torah law to recall God's swift salvation by eating the matza. The Jews were driven out from the Egyptian city Raamses, and arrived at Succot. When the Jews arrived, they were only able to bake that dough into matza, not bread, for the hastened exodus retarded the leavening process. The matza serves as a barometer of the speed by which God freed the Jews. Was this matza part of God's orchestrated events? Did God desire this barometer in the form of matza?

We should note at this point that the Jews in Egypt observed only one day of Passover (R. Yossi HaGalili, Jer. Talmud 14a). The Torah laws describing those Jews' obligation also appear to exclude any restriction of eating leaven. Certainly on the morrow of the Egyptian Passover, the Jews were permitted to eat leaven. Rabbeinu Nissim comments that it was only due to the rush of the Egyptians that their loaves were retarded in their leavening process. Had the Egyptians not rushed them, the Jews would have created bread for there was no prohibition on bread at that point.

But for which reason are we "commanded" in matza? The Haggada text clearly states it is based on the dough which did not rise during the Exodus. Thus, matza demonstrates salvation, the focus of the Passover holiday, posing this serious problem: not only do later generations have the command of eating matza, but the Jews in Egypt were also commanded in eating the Lamb with matza, (and maror). Now, if while still in Egypt, when there was yet no "swift salvation", why were those Jews commanded in this matza?

How can Jews in Egypt, not yet redeemed, commemorate a Redemption, which did not yet happen?!

It is true; the Jews ate matza while slaves. However, the Haggada says the "command" of eating matza was only due to the speedy salvation. This implies the Jews in Egypt who also had the command of matza, were obligated for the same reason, which is incomprehensible.

The Torah spends much time discussing the dough, and oddly, also refers to it in the singular, "And the people lifted up (carried) HIS loaf from the kneading troughs before it had risen, rolled up in their garments, placed on their shoulders (Exod. 12:34)." "And they baked THE loaf (Exod. 12:39)..." Why this 'singular' reference to numerous loaves? Why so much discussion about the loaf? And of what need is there for God to record, "...rolled up in their garments, placed on their shoulders"?

Finally, Rashi praises the Jews for not taking any provisions when they left: "And they baked the loaf they took out of Egypt into cakes of matza, because it did not leaven, because they were driven from Egypt, and they could not tarry, and also provisions they did not make for themselves (Exod. 12:39)." Rashi says the fact they did not take provisions demonstrated their trust that God would provide. If so, why in the very same verse, did the Jews bake the dough? This implies the exact opposite of Rashi's intent, that the Jews did in fact distrust God! It is startling that a contradiction to Rashi is derived from the very same verse. In order to answer these questions, I feel it is essential to gain some background ...

The Egyptians originated bread. Certainly, as they tortured the Jews, the Egyptian taskmasters ate their bread, as their Jewish slaves gaped enviously, breaking their teeth on dry matza, or "poor man's bread". The title of "poor man's bread" is a relative term -"poor" is always in comparison to something richer. "Poor man's bread" teaches that there was a "richer bread" in Egypt - real bread. The Egyptians enjoyed real bread, while they fed their Jewish slaves matza.

Let us now understand Rashi's comment. He said the Jews were praiseworthy, as they did not take food with them upon their exodus, thereby displaying a trust in God's ability to provide them with food. But we noted that in the very same verse where Rashi derives praise for the Jews who Rashi said took no food, it clearly states they in fact



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took the loaves! Rashi's source seems internally contradictory. I would suggest that a new attitude prevailed among the Jews.

The Significance of Bread

I do not feel the Jews took that loaf from Egypt for the purpose of consumption. This is Rashi's point. The Jews took the loaf because of what it represented: freedom. They were fed matza for the duration of their bondage. They were now free. They cherished this freedom and longed to embody it in expression. Making bread instead of dry, poor man's matza - was this expression of freedom. They now wished to be like their previous taskmasters, 'bread eaters'. A free people. Baking and eating bread was the very distinction between slave and master in Egypt. The Jews wished to shed their identity as slaves and don an image of a free people. Baking and eating bread would achieve this. To further prove that the Jews valued such identification with the Egyptians, Rashi comments that when the Jews despoiled the Egyptians at Moses' command, they valued the Egyptian clothing more than the silver and gold (Exodus 12:35).

The Jews' attachment to bread is made clear in two glaring details:

"And the people lifted up (carried) his loaf from the kneading troughs before it had risen, rolled up in their garments, placed on their shoulders (Exod., 12:34)." The Torah records a strange act: the Jews carried this loaf in their garments, not in a bag or sack. They additionally placed it on their shoulders. "The suit makes the man." In other words, as clothing is man's expression of his identity, the Jews placed in their clothes the dough intended to be come free man's bread. They expressed this link between clothing (identity) and the dough. Furthermore, they carried it on their shoulders, as a badge of sorts. They did not pack the dough away. It was a prized entity they wished to display, and form part of their dress.

Torah records these details as they are significant of the problem God was addressing. I view these two recorded details – "rolled up in their garments, placed on their shoulders" – as intentionally recorded in the Torah to reveal the Jew's value of bread. This idea, I find, is worthy of a few moments to appreciate.

Freedom: Not an Inherent Good

However, the Jews had the wrong idea. Their newfound freedom was not intended by God to be unrestricted. They were freed but for a new purpose; following God. Had they been allowed to indulge freedom unrestrained, expressed by eating leavened bread, this would corrupt God's plan that they serve Him. Freedom, and servitude to God, are mutually exclusive. Therefore, God did not allow the dough to rise. They trusted God, they saw all the miracles. They needed no food for their journey, as God would provide. But they took the dough in hopes of making that "free man's food", leavened bread. The cakes of dough were not taken for subsistence, but to symbolize their freedom. They hoped upon reaching their destination, to bake bread, expressing their own idea of freedom. But the verse says the dough only became matza, not their intended end-product. Matza was a mere result of a hurried exodus. Matza was so significant, that the Torah recorded this "event" of their failed bread making. They planned to bake bread, but it ended up matza. The Torah teaches that matza was not the Jews' plan. It points out through inference that they desired leavened bread. It also teaches that bread was not desired so much for subsistence, as they verse ends, (Exod,. 12:39) "and provisions they made not for themselves." They did not prepare food, as they relied on God for that. This is Rashi's point. The dough they took was not for provision; it was to unrestricted freedom. express This

unrestricted freedom is a direct contradiction to God's plan that they serve Him.

The Jews were now excited at the prospect of complete freedom. God's plan could not tolerate the Jews' wish. God desired the Jews to go from Egyptian servitude, to another servitude - adherence to God. He did not wish the Jews' to experience or express unrestricted freedom, as the Jews wished. To demonstrate this, God retarded the dough from leavening. The matza they baked at Succot was not an accident, but God's purposeful plan, that any expression of unrestricted freedom be thwarted.

One Act - Two Goals

Matza does not only recall God's swift salvation, but its also represents Egyptian servitude. In the precise activity that the Jews wished to express unrestricted freedom by baking bread, God stepped in with one action serving two major objectives: 1) By causing a swift ousting of the Jews, God did not allow the dough to rise. God did not allow the Jews to enjoy leavened bread, which would embody unrestricted freedom. 2) But even more amazing is that with one action of a speedy redemption, God not only restricted the dough's process, but He also "saved" the Jews - God became the Jews' savior. He replaced the Jews' intended, unrestricted freedom with the correct purpose of their salvation; to be indebted to God. The one act - God's swift Exodus - prevented the wrong idea of freedom from being realized, and also instilled in the Jews the right idea - they were now indebted to God, their Savior. They were not left to unrestricted freedom,



Ancient Egypt: Nile River

The Plague of Blood

The Red Sea From the film, "Exodus: Gods and Kings"



but were now bound to God by His new act of kindness. An astonishing point.

Gratitude

We return to the command to eat matza in Egypt. Obviously, this command could not commemorate an event, which did not yet happen. God commanded them to eat the matza for what it did represent - servitude. While in Egypt, why did God wish the Jews to be mindful of servitude? Here I feel we arrive at another basic theme of the Passover holiday; contrast between servitude and freedom. In Pesachim 116a, the Talmud records a Mishna, which states that our transmission of the Haggadah must commence with our degradation, and conclude with praise. We therefore discuss our servitude or our ancestor's idolatrous practices, and conclude with our salvation and praise for God. We do this, as such a contrast engenders a true appreciation for God's salvation. Perhaps also the two Passover holidays - in Egypt and today embody this concept of our salvation. A central goal of Passover is to arrive at an appreciation for God's kindness. A contrast between our Egyptian Passover and today's Passover will best engender such appreciation. It compares our previous bondage to our current freedom. Perhaps for this reason we are also commanded to view ourselves as if we left Egypt.

So in Egypt, we ate matza representing Egyptian servitude. Today we eat it as the Haggadah says, to recall the swift salvation, which retarded the leavening process, creating matza. We end up with a comparison between Passover of Egypt, and today's Passover: servitude versus salvation. The emergence of the Jewish people was on Passover. We have two Passovers, displaying the concept of a transition, a before and an after.

An interesting and subtle point is that God mimicked the matza of servitude. He orchestrated the salvation around matza. Why? Perhaps, since matza in its original form in Egypt embodied servitude, God wished that servitude be the continued theme of Passover. He therefore centered the salvation on the dough, which eventuated in matza; thereby teaching that we are to be slaves to God: "You are my slaves, and not slaves to man", is God's sentiment addressing a Jewish slave who wishes to remain eternally subservient to his mortal master. The Torah clearly views man's relationship to God as a servant.

With this understanding of the significance of leavened bread, we understand why the Torah refers to all the Jews' loaves in the singular. The Jews shared one common desire; to express their freedom by eating what their oppressors ate. However, contrary to human feelings, "unrestricted freedom" is an evil...odd as it sounds. God's plan in creating man was to direct us all in understanding and delighting in the truth of God, His role as the exclusive Creator, the One who manages man's affairs, and Who is

omnipotent (Ramban, Exod. 13:16). Go had a purpose in creating man, and it is not to be free and live as we wish. Our purpose is to engage the one faculty granted to us - our intellect. And the primary use of the intellect is forfeited when we do not recognize God, as the Egyptians displayed. Therefore, God freed us so we may enter a new servitude according to His will: serving Him. But this service of God should not be viewed as a negative, as in serving man. Serving God is achieved by studying Him, His Torah and creation - a truly happy and beautiful life. We could equate the enjoyment and benefit in serving God, to serving a human master who gives us gold if we simply look for it. We need not physically "dig" for it, just the act of seeking the gold would be rewarded with this master giving us abundant treasures. So too is the service of God. If we merely learn and seek new ideas, He will open new doors of wisdom. I am always amazed that we are so fortunate.

Finally, what is the significance of chametz, leaven? Once leavened bread took on the role of freedom with no connection to God, leaven thereby took on a character that opposes the very salvation, demonstrated by the matza. This now explains that leaven was not mentioned in connection with the instructions pertaining to the original Egyptian Paschal lamb. The Jews had not yet displayed any attachment to bread. Only subsequent to the first Passover celebration do we see the Jews' problematic tie to leavened bread. Therefore, only afterwards is there any prohibition on bread.







Silver & Buried Treasures RABBI'S MESSAGE

God not only "freed" us from the Egyptian bondage, but He also "saved" us, "redeemed" us and "took" us to Him. Much more can be said of these four kind acts, which are praised with our four cups of wine. God then elevated us above all other nations with His gift of the Torah. His design of man with intellect, teaches that this is our purpose: to engage in studying God through His creations and His Torah.

Sharing Torah knowledge has always been the core of Mesora.org and the Jewishtimes. As best as I can, I have labored to bring to your hearts a profound appreciation for Torah's brilliance. This is achieved by detecting God's clues in His written words, and toiling to uncover their precise, intended meaning. When we grasp the questions and then the answers that perfectly fit, we are astonished. And this is clearly God's plan, that questions are crafted into Torah's words, which also contain paths to the answers. This system engages the mind.

However, often times, people and teachers pass off Torah as cute tidbits, abundant quotes, or obvious notions. And although these might all be true, this is not to be compared with what I call true Torah study and knowledge. True study, is when we are fiercely loval to God's words, without projecting our own notions not demanded by God's words. Yes there are many ideas we can squeeze into a pasuk (verse) but as a wise Rabbi said, "What MUST you say?" Meaning, "What are the ideas demanded by the verse?" We can say many ideas, but as each pasuk is unique, each pasuk must be driving at a new and unique insight. And as far as I am concerned, if an idea doesn't make you pause and think, "Wow, that's interesting", then you have not uncovered the intent in that pasuk. Certainly, as the Author of Torah also created the billions of galaxies, microscopic particles, the intricate human body, the brain, and global natural laws that amaze us, His Torah lessons too must carry the same brilliance. So let us not simplify Torah, and not be satisfied with anything less than that.

In this issue, ("Matza") we discussed the problem of why the Jews rolled the dough in their garments, and also carried it on their shoulders during the Exodus. These are seemingly odd and unnecessary facts! We also learned of Ibn Ezra's observation, that Moses' staff was omitted from 3 plagues, and that Aaron performed 3 plagues alone. Why was this? The answers are found in the verse verses.

In the Torah's precise and exact words, God encoded many messages for us. And only through patient study and thought, will we arrive at God's lessons. Quick answers for the mere sake of removing the question, is not learning. In fact, we should treasure the question, for God wrote the Torah precisely in order that careful study presents questions!

I mention all this, since I have not stressed this in so few words. It is only the person who is demanding and particular in his or her study, someone desirous of understanding Torah's nuances and oddities, who will realize astonishing answers. But one with no questions, loses out on discovering the Torah's marvels.

We live once. The best life is lived by those who learn. And God's Torah design is such that the dedicated student of Torah at any age will be blessed with the continued discovery of greater and greater insights. These new ideas set one's curiosity on fire to delve even further.

Use the holiday to take time off from work. Plan time to study with a teacher, a family member or friend. And may we all realign ourselves with a greater attachment to Torah in both time, and diligence, so like the great Prophets and Rabbis, we enjoy life as God designed us, benefitting us here with thoroughly enjoyable insights, and in the next world with eternal life.

"If you seek it [Torah] like silver, and search for it like buried treasures. Then you will understand the fear of God, and the knowledge of God will you find. For God gives wisdom; from His mouth are knowledge and understanding (Proverbs 2:4-6)." Here too, we see King Solomon's method of cryptic writing...he mimics God's method, which generates questions through nuances. The Lessons: 1) You must value Torah like wealth. For only then are you compelled to chase it. 2) But even when you don't have sufficient clues and the answers evade you, like a undiscovered buried treasure, keep searching. 3) The King then explains the reason why we must search and why it is hidden, for it emanates from God, who is subtle, and deep. 4) But as His mouth - the written Torah - is available, study it. His articulations will guide you to great treasures! Chag Sameach!

Moshe Ben-Chaim

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