

SPECIAL ISSUE: COMPARATIVE RELIGIOUS BELIEFS

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PARSHA

Love &
Fear of
God

THEIR ROLES

DIALOGUE

Buddhist
& Rabbi

WORLDS APART

LETTERS

Jew or
Gentile

WHO'S BETTER OFF?

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Jewish
Civilization

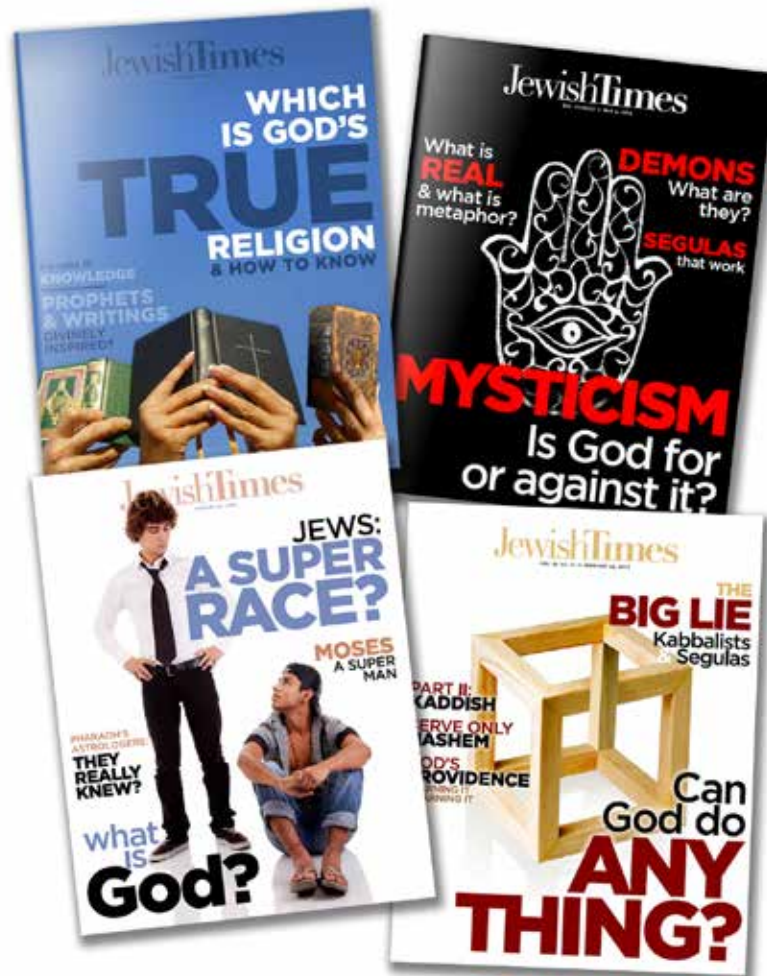
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LETTERS

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

Gentile or Jew: who is better off?

Reader: I understand that the Jewish soul is not superior to the gentile soul, and that the Jew is commanded to follow 613 commandments, while the gentile has only the 7 Noachide laws. Since there are so many laws a Jew must follow — a number of which have as their punishment the loss of the world to come — it appears that the gentile has an easier path to the world to come than the Jew! For the Jew, it's quite easy to violate many of these laws, especially the prohibitions of various types of speech and numerous Sabbath prohibitions.

Based on this, what is the advantage of being a Jew? A gentile can have all the luxuries of this world (no kosher laws) and easily earn the afterlife, but a Jew who struggles here, may end with suffering or no afterlife. Since every man sins and repentance can be quite difficult, suffering is guaranteed. Please try and enlighten me here as this has been bothering me for a long time. Thanks. (CONT. ON NEXT PAGE)

Rabbi: There are a number of issues:

1. What are God's rights?
2. What is the afterlife?
3. What earns us the afterlife, and is it equal for all?
4. What sins forfeits the afterlife, and why?
5. What is the Jew's advantage?
6. Risk vs. Gain

1. God's Rights

As Creator, He alone determines what is just, for He created "justice." But God also designed man with the faculty of intellect so we can recognize His justice. Many times, this requires that we abandon our subjective views and adopt new understandings and new ideas of justice. When younger, we might think that all acts of killing are wrong. But as we study God's justice, we learn that such an opinion is false, and that certain individuals and nations must be killed. Similarly, we might think that the path to the afterlife with fewer risks is preferred. But new considerations can change that view. I will explain.

2. What is the afterlife?

We must bear in mind the prophet's words, "No eye has seen it, except You [God] (Isaiah 64:3)." That being said, we do know the afterlife is the state of the soul no longer relating to the body. Its is a state with no physical limitations such as sleep, eating, and tiring, as we are no longer physical. The rabbis teach that in the afterlife, people who have attained a level of knowledge and attachment to truth will enjoy a great pleasure in greater knowledge.

3. What earns us the afterlife, and is it equal for all?

Maimonides teaches that the level of enjoyment, or the "portion" of the afterlife is proportional to one's knowledge. But this experience is available only to the person who has grasped fundamental truths concerning God.

4. What sins forfeits the afterlife, and why?

Maimonides teaches that one who does not know his 13 Principles, will forfeit the afterlife. See: www.Mesora.org/13principles.html

Through certain sins as well we will forfeit the afterlife.

Sins that forfeit the afterlife are those that fundamentally corrupt our souls. Afterlife is the state of the soul where man's attachment to God and His wisdom excels beyond earthly limitation. But if one is ignorant of God, or worse, thinks God is an idol or any other idolatrous notion, then he has no attachment to the true God, and thus, cannot experience the afterlife. The soul must have become attached to fundamental truths during life, for it to survive in the afterlife. But if a man or woman chased lusts and did not engage their minds in wisdom of God, His Torah and science, the Rabbis teach he is already as one who is dead, even during life. He is akin to a animal which has no soul.

One must recognize that the 613 laws — the Bible (Torah) — was not given until year 2448. What was God's plan? Apparently, God's will for Adam, Eve, their children, and all mankind until Moses, was that we were each to follow our intellects to arrive at God's will. God designed man that he possesses senses and reason, the two tools that tell man what is true. With these tools alone, throughout time, many people lived highly intellectual lives, and some rose to the heights of Aristotles, Freuds and Einsteins. So first off, man is perfectly equipped by his very design to reach high levels and earn the afterlife. This still applies. Why then did God's plan change that He gave a formal religion, a Torah? In His goodness, God granted al future generations an advancement — a means other that scientific study and philosophy — where man can more readily and quickly learn what are human perfections. Abraham and his children were unique, and did not require a Torah system, but most of mankind did. With time, new civilizations veered from God; many idolatrous cultures arose. The Torah was now required to redirect mankind to the path of truth, explaining why Torah includes numerous prohibitions against idolatrous rites and beliefs and its myriad of expressions.

Gentiles are not precluded from the same good offered to the Jew. It is God's will that all mankind recognize Judaism and the Torah as God's only religion, and this will be so in the

messianic era. But until then, the Jew's obligation is to make the Torah available to all mankind. There is nothing preventing a gentile from using his or her mind to investigate the world religions to determine that Judaism is the only true religion, and enjoy the benefit in all its laws and principles. But why was the Jew alone commanded in 613 laws? For it was the Jew alone who was monotheistic at that time in history. All peoples were immersed in idolatry. But Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and their descendants held fast to monotheism. To preserve the truth for mankind, God selected the man (Abraham) who demonstrated his free choice of monotheism. God made his descending 12 Tribes numerous, and gave them the Torah on Mt. Sinai 3300 years ago.

Torah is a system of perfection. The 7 Noachide laws are not. The latter are a minimal system that earns the gentile a right to life. If a gentile cannot adhere to these 7 minimal laws, then he has fallen below the threshold of God's tolerance and he forfeits his life. As such, this minimal system does not earn the gentile a share in the afterlife equal to one who toils over the 613 commandments. One who observes the 7 Noachide laws cannot attain the perfection of one observing 613 laws. The afterlife for each is far afield.

5. What is the Jew's advantage?

You asked of God's justice, saying a Jew has many areas wherein he can stumble and lose the afterlife. The answer is that in general, this is equally so for a gentile. As both Jew and gentile are perfect equals (we all descend from Noah) our corruptions are the same. That is, for the most part, the same act that causes the Jew to lose the afterlife (viz., idolatry) will cause the gentile to lose it as well.

But there are distinctions, as you stated, wherein violation does not forfeit the Jew's afterlife, and some violations that do.

The Jew is punished for eating non-kosher, whereas the gentile is not obligated in kosher laws. This distinction is in the area of perfection, where God desires the teachers of His Torah to be of a certain high degree of character. Maintaining a control over our appetite refines

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our psyches and sublimates our instinctual energies. This has a goal of making the Jew — the Torah's teachers — more suited for Torah study. If the Jew would not control his appetite and lusts, he would not find it within his tolerance to submit to hours upon hours of Torah study and have the knowledge to teach the nations.

A gentile is not obligated in circumcision, and if a Jew does not ensure he is circumcised, he will forfeit his afterlife. God desires a great benefit for all people. Starting with the world's teachers, the Jew, God's plan is that he identifies with Abraham, the first man to receive the command of circumcision. God wants man to hold in high esteem the life of Abraham, the gentile. Even post Sinai (after Torah was formulated) our blessing when circumcising our sons states, "to enter him (the son) into the treaty of Abraham our father." If I recall my Rabbi's lesson, this blessing highlights a man (Abraham) who achieved perfection without a Torah, a higher level of human perfection. Thus, a gentile who selects such perfected acts without obligation surpasses the Jew in this regard. Maimonides teaches that circumcision diminishes sexual sensation for both genders. With less of a sexual attachment, the Jew is again more suited to sublimate his energies to the higher pursuit of knowledge, which offers man the greatest fulfillment. Torah study is also the greatest command, for in its pursuit, man elevates his highest element, his soul. He attains greater wisdom of God. And this too is open to a gentile; he is to study his laws, and if he takes on more than his minimal 7 laws, which he is allowed to do, he is to study those laws too. And he can convert to attain equal status to a Jew, and enjoy the same portion of the afterlife.

But you are right regarding this law, the Jew can fatally stumble where the gentile can not. But this is God's will, that a single nation be held to higher standards for the sake of mankind. Holding the Jew to observe circumcision teaches the world that sensual pursuits are not the goal of mankind. God determined this lesson be taught by a nation who places such value on this command, and accepts the loss of the afterlife in its violation. But God informs us of this loss, so we are wise to not violate this command.

6. Risk must be measured against gain.

While the gentile has fewer chances to lose his afterlife, remaining with 7 laws does not provide him perfection of his soul, but only a right to earthly life, and an afterlife of small measure.

You asked, "Is there an advantage of being a Jew?" Certainly, for by following more commands, man earns greater perfection and a qualitatively greater afterlife. Gentiles may convert to enjoy the most perfected life. Nothing holds them back from enjoying the best life equal to a Jew, and nothing prevents a Jew from sinning and forfeiting the afterlife in the same manner as a gentile through grievous sins.

Should the gentile prefer to remain with less opportunity to lose the afterlife, or become a Jew with those risks — risks he can easily avoid — and enjoy the greatest afterlife through 613 commands and greater Torah study? When considering the eternal state of the afterlife, is it not wiser to invest effort now, and secure a greater eternal existence, and not a lesser external existence? Both, the intelligent gentile and the intelligent Jew will choose to follow the 613 system.

In the end, God has no favorites, as He willed each human to exist, each with equal potential. We cannot answer why God caused one soul to be born to gentiles and another to Jews. But that is irrelevant: God wants the good for all mankind, and His Torah is available to all who seek it. We must not feel it unjust that God gave the Jew "more chances to lose the afterlife." Rather, we must feel fortunate that He created us as Jew with the heritage that will ensure the greatest afterlife possible, and this can be achieved with little toil...for it relies mostly on Torah study. The intelligent gentile will convert. The prophet describes the future, when the gentiles will cleave to Torah.

Conclusion

Prior to Torah, to live properly, man was to engage his mind alone. However, civilizations corrupted themselves with sins that forfeited their afterlives. It was God's kindness to redirect man back to truth and away from sin that He gave a Torah; a guide for all mankind taught by a people bound by its many laws. This Torah contains great deterrents from evil, i.e., the loss of the afterlife for sinners. This deterrent will curb

future generations from reaching the severity of sin committed by the Egyptians, Canaanites and others. Viewing the risks alone (loss of afterlife), we might have one attitude towards the Jew's many obligations and high degree of scrutiny. But viewing the potential obtained through Torah, and the good it offers mankind, do we not recognize the benefits of deterrents, and also, that we have the free will to avoid risks and select God's great gift?

But Torah does not focus on the afterlife. For by doing so, one does not focus on the here and now, i.e., Torah study for its own immense pleasure. It is vital to recognize that regardless of the afterlife, one's earthly life is of a qualitatively greater experience when following God's commands, which by definition, requires study so as to grasp their purposes. For human perfection is not achieved physically, through the brute act of a command. Human perfection resides in the soul, and our souls are perfected through thought. One should live an earthly life where we are compelled by our love for truth; to investigate truth and live by it, without thought of reward. Ironically, when we live not for any reward, our lives are most enjoyable, and our reward increases. This is because attachment to truth can only exist when the attachment has no ulterior motive.

The benefit of the life following 613 commands and their profundity is therefore found first in our earthly existence, where we are amazed by God's wisdom and compelled to study it out of curiosity alone. This in turn earns us a great afterlife, a life of soul alone, where our soul which reaches great levels here, lives eternally in the attachment to God and His wisdom.

Rabbi Israel Chait offered this reply: "Your question is that the Jew has more opportunities to lose the world to come. But this is not simply a quantitative situation. A person who had the benefit of Torah, in violating a major crime [he] is committing a much worse crime since he is on a higher level, he loses more. At the same time, if he doesn't violate, he has more reward." Rabbi Chait's words are in line with the Sages' words, "The righteous are judged by a hair's breadth." God holds higher level people to a higher standard. This is because they should know better, and also because "Those whom God loves does He rebuke (Proverbs 3:12)" — God desires to refine the righteous. ■



LETTERS

Jewish Civilization

ITS IMPACT ON THE WORLD

Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim

Sarah Mangum of Deily.org asked me to reply to this question: How does the history of Jewish Civilization impact the world today?

Jewish civilization, from Abraham and Moses, through Maimonides and Rabbi Moshe Feinstein (late 1900s) have shared with the world a way of life based on truths, not beliefs. Throughout the existence of Jewish civilization, Biblical miracles[1] were witnessed by Jewish and gentile masses, unlike other religions that possess no evidence of God's interaction. This was the Creator's method of assisting truth-seekers, and endorsing such a life in the eyes of all peoples.

Before the Bible was given, in his monotheism, Abraham veered from the idolatrous ways of all other men. With no teacher, Maimonides recounts[2] how Abraham extricated himself from his idolatrous family and that culture. Using his mind alone, he discovered God. He grew in his wisdom, composed books, reached out to mankind and taught others until he had tens of thousands of followers. Threatened by leaders his philosophy opposed, God miraculously saved Abraham. Thus, even without the guide of the Bible, Abraham's perfection led him to lead a life where he valued truth and wisdom over all else, and

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his love for mankind compelled him to teach others, until they saw the truth with their minds.

Truth is at the core of Judaism. Sharing truth with others is at the core of the perfected man or woman. Truth convinces a person of what is real, not coercion, which is sinfully adopted in other religions.

The divine obligation of the Jew to is to share with all God's peoples His will, that is equal for all men and women. God gave only one religion[3], since there is only one mankind. As we each share the identical design, numerous religions is not sensible. As God commanded His one religion be not altered,[4] this point that just one religion is to exist forever was made patently clear. However, due to human insecurities and a need for tangible gods, man violated his reason and Biblical prohibitions by inventing new religions based on imagination, and without an ounce of validation.

Intelligent people must discern mass "acceptance" of other religions, from mass "witnesses" found only at Revelation at Sinai. Masses of followers do not validate that religion's beliefs as true, or as historical fact. Why did the two major religions not create their religion anew, from the ground up? Why did they base it on the Jewish Bible? This was because the Bible was recognized as absolute truth. Those religions would not be credible, or adopted, had they denied known Jewish history with a brand new religion.

For the purpose of this article, it is necessary to now briefly share the unique character of the Bible, which compelled the world to accept its accounts as true, like all history.

God designed man with reason and intelligence so that we engage both, and certainly in the most vital of areas, our relationship with God, i.e., religious life. Using reason, we today realize that such a massively-attended event — Revelation at Sinai — must have occurred. We possess the same proof as those 2.5 million eyewitnesses over 3300 years ago. For if Revelation at Sinai did not take place, and Moses attempted to convince individuals that they and millions of others saw something which they had not, the story would never get off the ground. Moses would be viewed as a psychotic. That nation would not adopt Moses' lies in place of what they all knew was their true history. Imagine someone telling a few thousand New Yorkers that they just witnessed the Twin Towers suddenly reappearing. Not a single soul would pass this on to his children as a true event, and 3000 years for now, such an event will not be incorporated by major

religions as part of their systems. This is exactly what Moses would have confronted, had he lied about Sinai. But the fact that the world accepted the account throughout time, is a testament to the truth of God's revelation. It must have occurred. As is true regarding any historical account, Sinai too relies on mass witnesses for its validation. But had it simply been Moses' word alone, or the word of small groups, this does not provide proof, for motive to lie can be found in small groups. Only with mass witnesses do we know for certain that an event transpired. This was the single time in history where God revealed Himself to man. Additionally, had Moses lied, today the world should be in receipt of the "true" Jewish history during the time of Moses' lie. But there exists no "alternative Jewish history."

Mass witnesses is how the Bible and all histories are proven. Without mass witnesses, all other religious claims remain unproved, explaining why other religions demand faith. For they have no proof. This reasoning proves the historical truths of Caesar, Alexander and others. The Bible is no different.

Sadly, Jews do not share this core Biblical history, allowing false religions to flourish. Here, Jewish civilization's history is not impacting the world out of silence.

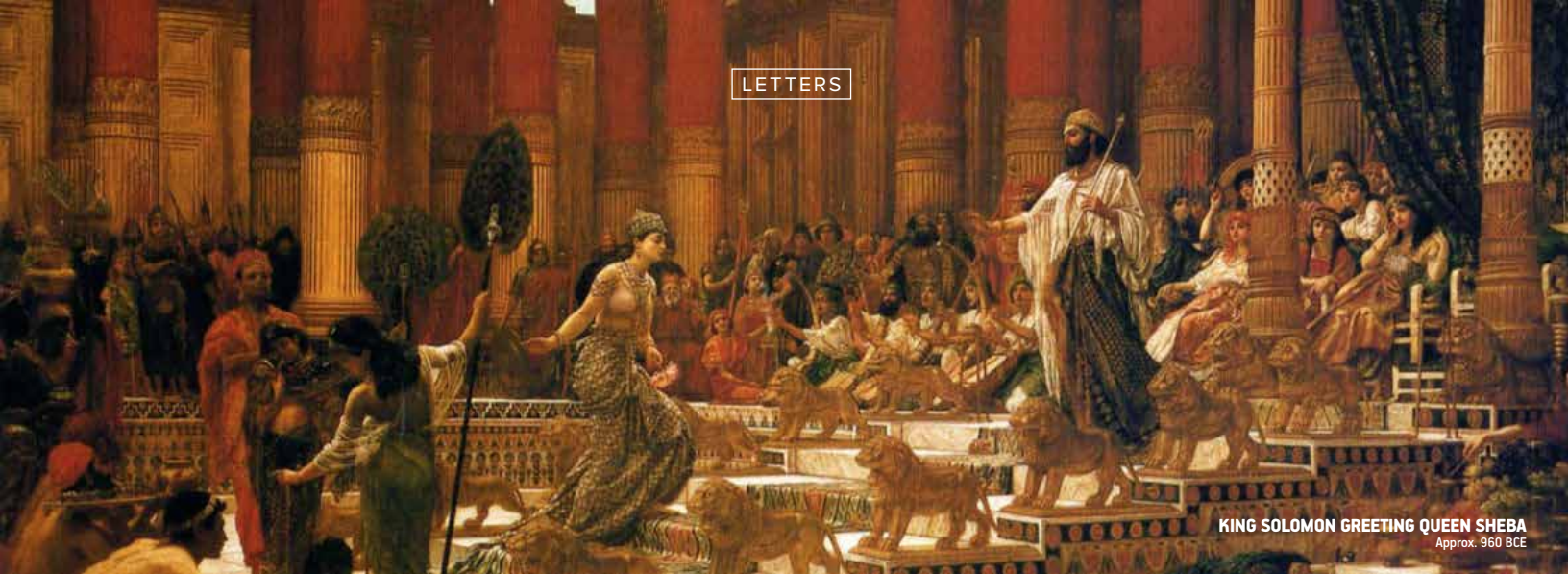
God orchestrated an undeniable miracle at Sinai: intelligent words emanating from the inferno of Sinai. Nothing of biological or of earthly origin survives in fire. In all other elements, we do find life. But fire is the one element inside of which all life perishes. That 2.5 million Jews heard intelligent words emanating from fire was proof that there exists an intelligent being not of physical form. This is precisely why God included fire in the miracle! God's existence was thereby proved, as was His single religion for mankind. And as God included in His words that His Bible not be altered in any way for all time[4], we understand He intended only one religion for man. The Jews — and not another people — received this law, for all other peoples were then idolatrous. Abraham alone was mono-theistic. Abraham's descendants through Isaac and Jacob then became the keepers of God's law for all peoples.

As Revelation at Sinai became the litmus test for validating God's word, by comparison, all other religions claiming divine origin fail to prove themselves. For God demonstrated that when He wishes to prove His words, He does so with undeniable miracles attended by millions of witnesses. He does not wish confusion among men as to what He said and what He did not.

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REVELATION AT SINAI
Stained glass depiction



KING SOLOMON GREETING QUEEN SHEBA
Approx. 960 BCE

Revelation at Sinai impacted the world for some time afterwards. God's Bible makes a remarkable and indelible impression on an intelligent person, just like it did on Queen Sheba:

Kings I, 10:1-10:

"And Queen Sheba heard the tidings of Solomon in the name of God, and she came to test him with riddles. And she came to Jerusalem with an exceedingly great entourage, camels carrying spices, and very much gold, and fine stones, and she came to Solomon and spoke to him, all that she had on her heart. And Solomon told her all her words, there was no matter hidden from the king that he did not tell (respond) to her. And Queen Sheba saw all the wisdom of Solomon, and the house (Temple) that he built. And the food of his table, and the sitting of his servants, and the standing of his officers, and their clothing and their drinks, and his sacrifices that he brought up to the house of God, and she had no spirit left in her. And she said to the king, "The matter that I heard in my land was true regarding your matters and your wisdom. And I did not believe the matters until I came, and my eyes saw, and not even half the matter was told to me, there is more wisdom and good than the matter I heard. It should be that God is blessed, in that he desired you, to place you onto the throne of Israel in God's eternal love for Israel, and He has placed you as king to do justice and righteousness." And she gave to the king 120 kikar of gold, and very much spices, and fine stones. There never came again the quantity of spices that Queen Sheba gave to King Solomon."

But as the Jewish nation sinned, our temple was twice destroyed on the identical dates 656 years apart, in 586 BCE and 70 CE, both on the 9th of the Jewish month Av. The identical date was God's message of His divine retribution for our sins of idolatry and failed morality. Astonishingly, this date was also when the Jews refused to enter the land of Israel in Moses' era. God ensured this date be echoed throughout time. Ultimately, the Jews became a derision of the nations as described by Jeremiah in the book Lamentations (Eicha). We no longer held the reputation that earned us respect, nor did we possess the voice to impact others. The message to the world we once offered, was silenced. What were some of those primary lessons?

- God exists and works with Reward and Punishment:

The Ten Plagues exposed idolatry and all its beliefs as false, for no god of Egypt was able to defend itself against the Ten Plagues. Furthermore, false theories that God abandoned the world were rejected. And most crucial was that the world learned that when a people unjustly enslaves and tortures another people who follow the one true God, Abraham's children, they are punished.

- God desires man trust his senses and intelligence:

The Ten Plagues also taught mankind that what is true and real, is what we perceive. This was in contrast to Egypt's beliefs in dormant imaginary powers and silent gods. Only the God of the enslaved Hebrews — Abraham's and Isaac's seed — manipulated natural laws to orchestrate the plagues.

- God needs no help:

The Ten Plagues also demonstrated that God alone rules the universe; all of the Earth, the heavens and all in between.

- God desires the good for man:

God's laws and teachings — His Bible or Torah — gave the development of mankind a giant leap forward; ideas that may not have been arrived at for centuries independent from prophecy, were suddenly within grasp. The 613 laws and numerous principles and moral truths open man's eyes to authoritative insights.

For those who today question the validity of all stated above, one must be honest and wonder why not only the Jews, but why Christianity and Islam accept the Jewish history, the Bible, we call the Torah. The greatest minds known to man, the original recipients of the Bible all hold the Bible to be true, including: Moses, Joshua, and the Bible's original teachers, Kings David and Solomon, the Prophets, hundreds of the authoritative Talmudic and Mishnaic sages, and the Rishonim — medieval Rabbis including Rashi, Maimonides, Nachmanides, Ibn Ezra, Sforno and many others. And we know these men to be brilliant, as they authored works like Deuteronomy (Moses), Psalms (King David), and Proverbs (King Solomon). (CONT. ON NEXT PAGE)

Despite God's commands not to alter His Bible, not to create physical deities, not to deify man, to affirm that He alone runs the world He created, and that His chosen emissaries to mankind are Isaac's children — not Ishmael's children[5] — and that the Messiah descends from Davidic lineage...despite the clarity of God's words, new religions arose violating all these commands. Why? Judaism's truth was unbearable. Other peoples could not tolerate they were not God's chosen nation. The hostility was generated as they failed to realize that the Jews were not selected to remain exclusive: the Bible is intended for all mankind. God merely commanded Isaac's descendants in protecting the Bible's teachings. But this message was obscured by the failure of others to study God's clear words. They acted based on emotions instead of reason. The Rabbis rightfully ask, "Why is Mt. Sinai called Sinai?" They answer, "For from Sinai came forth 'sina' (hatred)." Revelation at Sinai was undeniable. The Jew was chosen to receive God's one-time communication, and then share it with man. But the sibling rivalry of other peoples generated contempt for the Jew, and drove them to rewrite history, making them God's chosen, replacing the Jew. Christianity altered God's word and added to it, fabricating events and characters to mimic Biblical accounts[6]. And Islam took the corrupt path of taking credit for giving Moses to the Jews, and Jesus to the Christians. Both religions are fabricated ploys to gain credibility. Both religions used the sword to threaten conversions, since reason and proof was not on their side. But Judaism never committed such atrocities, for the Jewish ethic is that each man use his free will to decide his life. Coercion is not God's plan, so this is not the Jew's plan. The emergence of Judaism evoked jealousy, instead of intelligent study and respect for God's proven words.

Today, Israel and Judaism are still targeted without provocation, and for the same reason: the world recognizes the truth of Revelation at Sinai. But it can't handle such "favoritism," which is the wrong interpretation of why God selected the Jew, as stated above. Despite increasing the risk of losing more soldiers, Israel takes sacrificial measures to protect Palestinian civilians when defending itself from missile attacks. Despite Hamas' and the Palestinians' firing missiles from civilian

populations, schools and hospitals, Israel is the one condemned. Despite the ongoing martyrdom indoctrination by Abbas of Palestinian children that robs their lives, an indoctrination incited by the lie of "occupation," while unearthed evidence of Jewish nationhood dates back 3000 years...Israel is condemned. An unbiased assessment reveals that this aggression against the Jew must come from our one peculiarity, that being the only people with whom God spoke.

From his persecution, the Jew has become fearful; his silence adds to the anti-Semitic wave. But this is one Jew who is not afraid. In fact, it is not an issue of fear, but a desire to share God's knowledge that I undertake my obligation to study the Bible and teach it. The Bible reveals beautiful marvels, all true to one's mind, and it is the most fulfilling experience. The attachment to truth and the care to share truths with all other peoples is what compels a Jew to teach. There is no ulterior motive, but the love of another one of God's creatures that motivates a person share the truth. This is what motivates me. And for 20 years, I have labored to present the truth, i.e., God's Bible, freely, to all who are interested, with no other motive (see www.mesora.org). I have seen firsthand, perhaps hundreds of times, where gentiles and unaffiliated Jews who are shown the Bible's marvels, recognize it as the one true religion.

Sorrowfully today, many Jews do not follow Abraham's lead, to unabashedly and genuinely share monotheism with all peoples. Thereby, they allow other religions to retain credibility, although they violate many Biblical fundamentals. The degree of impact Jewish civilization once had, where Queen Sheba and the Jews[7] were enamored by King Solomon's wisdom, where Abraham had tens of thousands of followers drawn to him due to his intelligence, is no longer. But these histories are a clear lesson of the potential of God's Bible when taught truthfully and openly.

Jewish civilization once had tremendous impact on the world. Not to validate them in anyway, but world religions would not exist today, had the Jewish people never existed. The major religions cannibalized Judaism, distorted it beyond form, and threw it back at the world saying, "This is God's true religion." This is akin to someone building a wagon, bringing it to Henry Ford and telling him,

"This is the real Ford."

God's plan will still come to fruition, and this will be spearheaded by His Messiah, when God deems the time proper. This too is based on the validated prophecies of the Jewish prophets. But until that time, each Jew has the obligation to share the truth with the world. In this manner, all peoples can benefit. If the world will recognize the source of anti-Semitism and abandon that baseless hatred...if religions will recognize the truth of Revelation at Sinai and allow the Jew to teach them the undistorted Bible, like Queen Sheba, all peoples will be impacted by the Bible's astonishing insights the Jews have carried and died for, for 3300 years. All people would recognize the fallacy of their religions, and realize God gave but one religion to His one mankind. ■

Footnotes

- [1] Noah's Flood, the Ten Plagues, the Splitting of the Reed Sea and the Jordan, Revelation at Sinai, the manna, the pillars of cloud and fire, Miriam's well, the sun and moon halting mid-sky, the walls of Jericho, and many others.
- [2] Maimonides' Mishne Torah, Laws of Star Worship, 1:3
- [3] There exists no history other than Revelation at Sinai where God communicated with mankind.
- [4] "Every thing which I command you to do, that is what you should be careful to do. Do not add upon, it and do not detract from it (Deut. 13:1)."
- [5] Gen. 21:12
- [6] Exodus, 4:19: "God said to Moses in Midyan, go, return to Egypt, for there have died all the men that sought your life." Matthew 2:20: "Rise, take the child and his mother, and go to the land of Israel, for those who sought the child's life are dead."
- Exodus 1:16: "And (the king of Egypt) said, 'when the Hebrew women give birth, and look upon the stone, if it is a son, kill him, and if it is a daughter, let it live.'" Matthew 2:16: "Then Herod, when he saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, was in a furious rage, and he sent and killed all the male children in Bethlehem and in all that region who were two years old or under..."
- Genesis 37:25: "And there passed by Midianite men, traders, and they drew him and lifted him (Joseph) out of the pit and they sold Joseph to the Ishmaelites for 20 pieces of silver and they brought Joseph to Egypt."
- Matthew 26:14-15: "14. Then one of the twelve, who was called Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests 15. and said, 'What will you give me if I deliver him to you?' And they paid him thirty pieces of silver."
- [7] Kings I, 3:28

PARSHA

A Dose of Fear

EMOR

Rabbi Reuven Mann



This week's parsha, Emor, elucidates the special laws of purity that apply to Kohanim. Their significance was most pertinent in the time when the Temple existed, because those who hold positions of spiritual leadership must, in every area of life, abide by a higher standard of holiness than others. The laws remain in effect even in the present era, for we live with the certainty that it is only a matter of time until Moshiach (the Messiah) will come, and the complete Temple service will be reinstated.

Emor also contains the section of Torah that enumerates our holy days. In addition to the weekly Shabbat, which affirms Creation, the other holidays fall into two categories. The three Pilgrimage Festivals celebrate G-d's special relationship with the Jewish people. Passover recounts the Exodus and Shavuot the Revelation on Mount Sinai. Sukkot, the third of this trilogy, proclaims the unique Divine Providence that accompanied the Jews in their long wilderness journey.

The remaining two holy days, Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, revolve around Hashem's rule of the universe. This is the time when all created beings, both individuals and societies, come before the King for judgment. Judaism asserts the principle of G-d's infinite mercy. Thus, all sins, no matter how egregious, can be atoned for through heartfelt and genuine teshuvah (repentance).

A major theme pertaining to Judaism in general, and the holidays in particular, is that of serving Hashem with simchah (joy), a unique religious concept. Most people draw a definite line between being religious and being joyful. They believe, to the contrary, that one serves G-d by relinquishing life's pleasures and enduring privations.

Judaism is categorically opposed to all forms of human suffering. It is a mitzvah to protect one's physical and emotional health. Our religion affirms that man must be in the healthiest condition, so he can

muster the energy to achieve the high moral level that Hashem has designated for him.

Divine service is not limited to performance of commandments. It encompasses every area of human endeavor. All of a person's activities, sublime and mundane, are governed by Torah principles and ideals. Judaism believes that man's task is to live the lifestyle of wisdom, holiness, and compassion.

When a person who is healthy and energetic lives a Jewish life infused with meaning, he experiences great joy. He feels a new appreciation for Torah and the One who gave it. He is happy that he was tasked with the 613 commandments and serves Hashem with simchah. However, while the service of love is what we strive for, we should not discard the emotion of fear. Even though it is a mitzvah to love G-d, we are also commanded to fear Him.

On the surface, this seems ambivalent. If we love Hashem, why is it necessary to fear Him? Love will motivate a person to obey G-d's will and emulate His ways. Why is it also mandatory to be afraid?

On the highest level, the fear of G-d is transformed into a sense of awe at the majesty of the Creator. Thus, it doesn't mean that we should be scared of the punishments we will suffer as a result of our sins. As we grow and mature philosophically, we recognize the great beauty of the Torah way of life and are motivated by the desire to experience it.

However, no matter how exalted a level we attain, we may never dispense with the primal dread of the dire consequences of yielding to sinful temptation. We must never be guilty of overestimating ourselves and losing sight of the great power of our animal instincts. We should never be righteous in our own minds and forget the warning of the great Sage who taught, "Do not believe in yourself until the day you die." We are also urged to "be like servants who serve the Master without the desire for reward, and let the fear of Heaven be upon you."

Let us strive to cultivate a healthy fear of Hashem. This will protect us from the numerous allurements to which we are constantly subjected and provide the impetus to upgrade our religious service to the level of love.

Shabbat shalom. ■

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RELIGIOUS BELIEFS

Response to a Zen Buddhist

THE DISPARITY BETWEEN JUDAISM AND OTHERS

Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim



Dr. David Zuniga: No one, in any tradition (Jewish, Christian or otherwise) has “proven” what the divine transmission of the bible is. Proof means discovering and demonstrating empirical evidence that can repeatedly be verified in a variety of settings. You, just like believers of other traditions, have faith that satisfies you. And I’m glad you do. But respectfully, your theology of the bible isn’t objective proof.

R. Moshe Ben-Chaim: David, respectfully, you have made an error by projecting onto me your guess of what I hold to be true. It would be productive to first inquire of my position, prior to making a false decision.

I do not “believe” in the Bible, but know it to be truth, as true as any historical event attended by masses. I will explain shortly.

As the proof I will repeat below is the core foundation of the Bible, the very event of God giving man the Bible, I am surprised you did not hear of it.

Dr. David Zuniga: “Why did God flood the entire Earth in Noah’s generation?” It sounds like you engage in textual literalism. Yet I know other learned rabbis who see that biblical story more as symbolic mythology than a literal, historical account.

R. Moshe Ben-Chaim: It appears you prefer the student over the teacher. The original recipients of the Bible, i.e. Moses, Joshua, and the Bible’s

original teachers, Kings David and Solomon, the Prophets, hundreds of the authoritative Talmudic and Mishnaic sages, and the Rishonim — medieval Rabbis including Rashi, Maimonides, Nachmanides, Ibn Ezra, Sforno and many others — all hold the Bible to be literal. I am not concerned that those with lesser minds (rabbis with whom you’ve conversed) who have not authored works like Deuteronomy (Moses), Psalms (King David), or Proverbs (King Solomon) will casually suggest a fantasy or whim that the Bible is not literal. Today’s rabbis are not authoritative.

Now, as you see today’s rabbis conflict with the Bible’s recipient Moses, and its original teachers, both views cannot be correct: either the Flood (and the entire Bible) occurred literally, or it did not. How do you decide the truth?

I am interested in clarity and a conclusion. I would not suggest to someone to simply follow his heart on such a decision, as the matter is great. Similarly, I would not suggest to someone to follow his heart on which surgeon to perform a life-threatening operation. I would, instead, urge him to use his mind to determine definitively, who is the most fitting doctor.

The existence of God is not left to faith. God designed man with reason and intelligence so that we engage both, and certainly in the most vital of areas, our relationship with God, i.e., religious life. Using reason, we

(CONT. ON NEXT PAGE)

today realize that such a massively-attended event — Revelation at Sinai — must have occurred. We possess the same proof as those eyewitnesses over 3300 years ago. For if Revelation at Sinai did not take place, and Moses attempted to convince some nation that they and millions of others saw something which they had not, the story would never get off the ground. Moses would be viewed as a psychotic. That nation would not adopt Moses' lies in place of what they all knew was their true history. Imagine someone telling a few thousand New Yorkers that they just witnessed the Twin Towers suddenly reappearing. Not a single soul would pass this on to his children as a true event, and 3000 years for now, such an event will not be incorporated by major religions. This is exactly what Moses would have confronted, had he lied about Sinai. But the fact that the world accepted the account throughout time and up to today, is a testament to the truth of God's revelation. It must have occurred. As is true regarding any historical account, Sinai too relies on mass witnesses for its validation. But had it simply been Moses' word alone, or the word of small groups, this does not provide proof, for motive to lie can be found in small groups. Only with mass witnesses do we know for certain that an event transpired. This was the single time in history where God revealed Himself to man. Additionally, had Moses lied, today the world should be in receipt of the "true" history of the Jews during the time of Moses' lie. But there is no "alternative Jewish history."

Mass witnesses is how the Bible — and any history — is proven, and all other religious claims are unproved, explaining why other religions demand faith. For they have no proof. You follow this reasoning to accept the historical truth of Caesar, Alexander and others. The Bible is no different.

Without proof of a doctor's credentials and history of success, one endangers his body when undergoing a life-threatening operation. Without proof of a religion's claim as "God's word," one endangers his soul by violating God's will, a will that he could have learned had he expended the proper energy and intelligence in research.

It must, at the least, be a concern to learn that from Moses to Maimonides, there was no confusion: they all understood the Bible as literal. Why do you think they had no argument on this?

Dr. David Zuniga: You state that studies of the bible and Talmud is "the only method to accurately answer your questions." But I've known Muslims and atheists and many others from other traditions who don't share your central emphasis of your texts and yet develop equally sophisticated philosophical perspectives, which likely make them just as happy and ethical as you are.

R. Moshe Ben-Chaim: Happiness with an ethical system does not equate to truth. Psychotics too are happy. Your original question was how one determines whom to forgive, and I replied that this depends on what is a worthy matter, to which one may rightfully take offense. This can only be defined by an Authority — God — as a large portion of morality cannot be arrived at by reason.

Dr. David Zuniga: As a Zen Buddhist, I don't want the bible, Talmud, or Koran to be the basis for civil law. I also don't want the Pali canon or Koan literature to form civil law either. I respect people's right to have individual differences.

R. Moshe Ben-Chaim: I don't see how your personal wants play any role in determining objective truth. There is but one mankind. Two people with the identical illness are treated similarly. Our bodies are identical. So too, our psyches and minds are identical. We all strive to be happy and avoid pain. We all sense loss when one dies; and we are joyful at a birth. We all sense justice, feel anger, love and the myriad of emotions and feelings. As there is but one design of man, it is reasonable that God gave only one religion. I too respect people's right to have individual differences. But they cannot all be correct, if they differ. My search is for truth, not a faith which might very well be wrong...certainly, if it conflicts with God's proven words. ■

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