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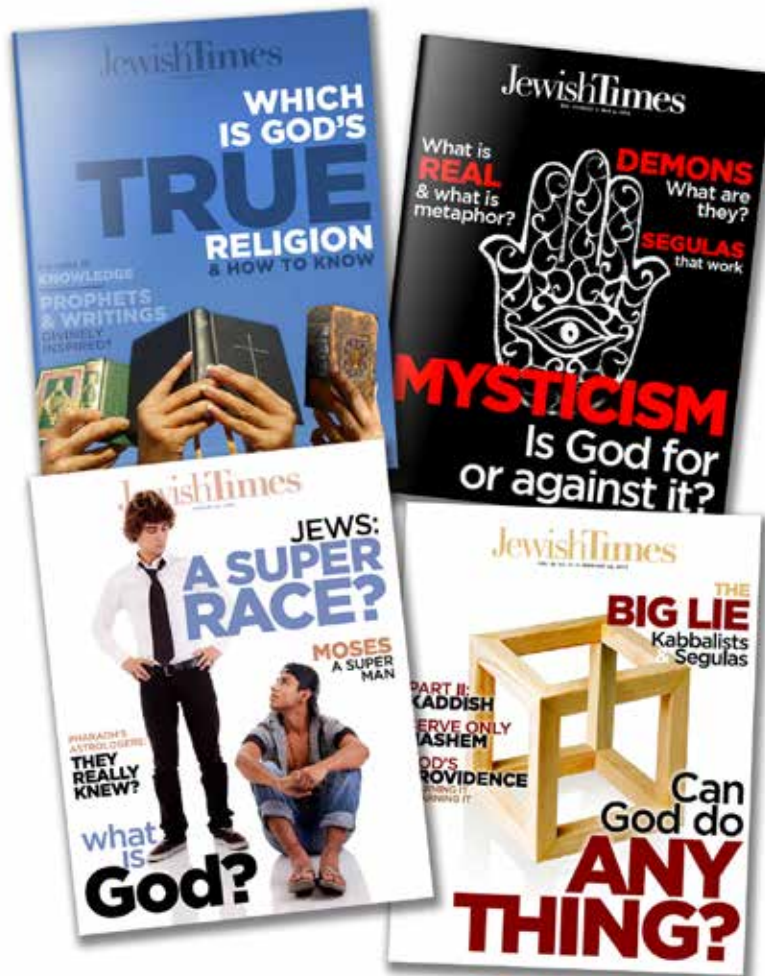


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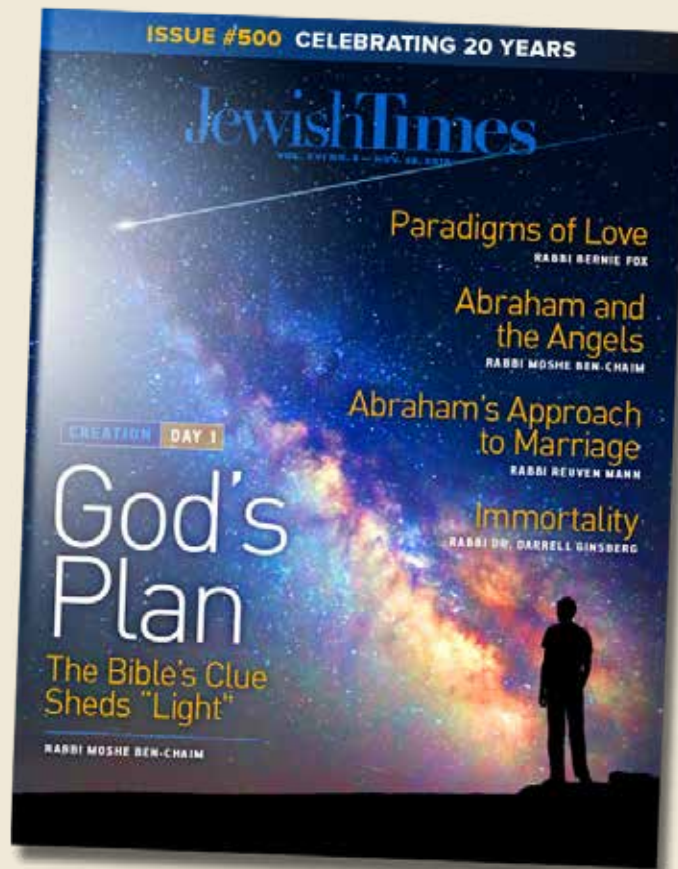
### 500th ISSUE

RABBI REUVEN MANN

## The Jewishtimes Turns 500

It is great pleasure to mark the occasion of the 500th edition of the Jewish Times. This project which was the inspiration of Rabbi Moshe Ben Chaim has disseminated much substantial Jewish knowledge to many people across the globe.

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The publication is very unique. Rabbi Ben Chaim addresses the most serious religious issues that pertain to Judaism. He does so with honesty, deep probing and most important, a rational approach.

He opens the forum to readers and solicits their questions. He is very dedicated to answering in a true and inspiring manner. Another important feature of the publication is the fact that the Rabbi gathers the thoughts and writings of many other profound Torah thinkers. If one reads the Times on a regular basis he will derive a meaningful Torah education and unique perspective on the relevance of the Torah to all times and situations. He will obtain a clear comprehension of the Jewish way of life and why it is so rationally compelling.

These are just some of the many benefits of the wonderful work of Rabbi Ben Chaim. I offer my heartfelt congratulations at this time and wish him much success in the years to come. May Hashem grant him the strength and opportunity to continue his noble work of spreading the genuine message of Torah. ■

I thank Rabbi Mann for his kind words, for 40 years of his Torah and for his essay contributions since the Jewishtimes was founded. I have learned from him a great deal in all areas of Torah and morality. Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim

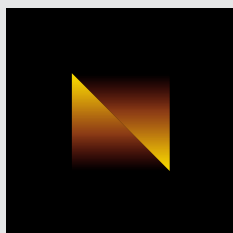
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# God's Plan

## The Bible's Clue Sheds "Light"

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

In the Bible's second book (Exod. 19 and 20) 3330 years ago, God reveals Himself on Mt. Sinai to the nation of the Jews, 2.5 million Children of Israel (Jacob). God gave His Bible to the Jews and shared His command that we study it, that we fulfill all 613 commandments as our life's mission, and teach the rest of mankind its fundamental truths and laws. For as there is only one God and one mankind, there is only one religion. Giving His religion to mankind only once, and giving it to the Jew, renders the Jew mankind's teacher.

In addition to this Written Law, the Bible, God also gave the Jews the Oral Law, the Mishna. 2000 years ago, the Rabbis spent 300 years elaborating on its profound principles and laws, known as the Talmud. This large work contains precise, analytic formulations of Jewish law. Talmud also includes Midrash; exaggerations, metaphors, parables, allegories, similes and other forms of wise, disguised lessons. Disguise was employed to secure the transmission of crucial ideas, and to conceal truths from those not ready to accept these principles. This includes Bible text derivations that unlock coded truths the Rabbis received back to Moses' time. The Rabbis and Talmudic Sages offer us a chance to unveil the Bible's mysteries. And when we see their underlying messages, we are in awe of their wisdom, and also of their ability to write so ingeniously. I wish to share one such Talmudic derivation I recently discovered pertaining to Creation:

"Rabbi Eliezer said, 'Through the light God created on the first day (Gen. 1:3), Adam was capable of viewing one end of the world to the other. But once God saw that the despicable actions of generations of the Flood and of the Dispersion (Tower of Babel) God stood up and hid this light from them, as it says, 'And He held back from the wicked their light (Job 38:15).' But for whom did God keep this light stored away? For the righteous in the future (Tal. Chagiga 12a).'"

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Are we to believe the world became dark during those sinful generations? Certainly, the sun, moon and stars had their natural laws suspended only “during” the Flood; not before or after, i.e., not during civilization’s sin leading to the Flood, or during the Dispersion afterwards (Gen. 8:22). So what was this “light?” Furthermore, what was God’s concern in hiding this light, that sinful people would not have access to this light? The Torah (Bible) does not indicate that Noah’s generation sinned because of abusing light...they sinned sexually and morally. And the generation of the Dispersion sinned in its aggression towards God. Light or no light, these generations’ sins came from their instincts, not light. Clearly, this Talmudic metaphor is not describing physical light.

As the sun, moon and stars were not created until Day Four (Gen. 1:16), what is the “light” created on Day One (ibid 1:3)? Also, God uses the term “vayaas” — “And He made” — when describing physical creation. But when creating the “light” on Day One, God merely “says” it to be so: by His word alone this “light” came into being. Of course, having no physicality or human organs, God cannot speak. Thus, in reference to God, “speaking” or “saying” indicates His will. So, through will alone, was this first light made, whereas the luminaries were created — “vayaas” — through another process of forming existing matter. Again, what is this “light” on Day One?

## THE CLUES

God provides mankind clues to unravel this mystery:

- 1) this light was created on the first day,
- 2) with this “light,” Adam was able to view the entire world,
- 3) this light is somehow unrelated (hidden) relating to wicked generations,
- 4) this light would eventually find its purpose among the

righteous in the future.

5) Most difficult however, is God’s “afterthought.” He created time, and therefore He is above time. Thus, He need not “wait” to see the future generations’ sins. He knew of their sins even before He created the universe! How then do we understand the quote, “But once God saw that the despicable actions of generations of the Flood and of the Dispersion (Tower of Babel) God stood up and hid this light from them”?

## THE SAME PHRASEOLOGY SHEDS LIGHT

Another Talmudic portion speaks in similar fashion, and can

shed light on this. Talmud Avoda Zara 2b, quoting Havaikuk 3:6 says that at one point in history, “God arose, assessed mankind, He ‘saw’ and released the nations from their 7 Noahide commands.” The Talmud asks, “What did God see?” The Talmud answers, “He saw that the nations abandoned the Noahide laws, and therefore God released them from their obligation.” We know this release is not literal, so how do we understand this?

The Talmud concludes that as the nations abandoned Noahide laws, any future Noahide who followed the laws would be considered as one “not

commanded.” Meaning, once the chain of transmission of Noahide law was broken and no longer transmitted, all future Noahides would not be “following God,” since the transmission that God commanded these laws was lost from society. As such, a Noahide’s adherence to any of these laws (principles) would not be out of obedience to God, but based on societal practicality, “as if” God released them. Thus, such individuals could not be rewarded as “followers of God” for their generation was no longer in receipt of a transmission from God. It is only one who knows that he is adhering to “God’s will” who truly lives “subservient” to God. And only

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when man serves God — not acting merely for practical reasons — does he or she earn God's reward. (Similarly, if one waves the Lulav, not knowing it is God's command, he cannot receive reward for "following a command.")

In fact, God did not "release" the Noahides, they are still obligated in those 7 laws. Loss of the transmission is described "as if" God released them, since He can no longer reward any Noahide who fulfills these 7 principles without knowing God desires them to do so. The Rabbis phrase the Noahide's loss of transmission of God's commands as the Noahides own doing — "as if" God had released their obligation. This must be clear.

The same applies to our case; God did not "hide the light." This "hiding of light" too must be ascribed to the actions of the generations of the Flood and the Dispersion, and not to an act of God.

Torah has a precedent: light refers to

knowledge, as in, "Nare mitzvah, v'Torah ohr; A (single) flame is a command, and Torah is light (Proverbs 6:22)." That is, one mitzvah is akin to a single flame, whereas Torah (all mitzvos) create light, something greater than what a single mitzvah achieves. Light allows man to acquire knowledge through sight, just as mitzvah and Torah informs man of truths. Thus, light refers to knowledge.

### THE RIDDLE SOLVED

Physical light was part of Creation. But Rabbi Eliezer teaches that more than just physical matter must have been part of Creation. Why? Physical matter alone cannot be God's objective in Creation; matter cannot exist for itself. A universe that abounds with giant mysteries and brilliant answers must have as its goal, the realization of the Mind behind it all; God. Why permeate the universe with astonishing scientific marvels, if not for a race of beings to perceive them all? As

inanimate matter cannot "realize" anything — it is lifeless substance — intelligence, and intelligent beings must be God's objective.

Thus, Rabbi Eliezer teaches that such monotheistic knowledge must play a central role in Creation. So crucial is this knowledge, this "other light," that God created it on Day One. In other words, Creation was justified only by attainment of knowledge of God. Being created immediately on Day One convey's its essential role in Creation.

Now, as we know this "light" is not the sun, for it was created 3 days later, to what type of knowledge does this "light" refer? It cannot refer to sciences, since physical creation — what God made subsequent to this light — gives evidence to natural laws. What then was this other "light?"

The other "light" refers to knowledge of God's justice: crime, morality, reward

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and punishment. I say this, since this light was “hidden” from sinful societies. But God did not hide this knowledge. This hiding means those societies followed their instinctual urges, and ignored justice...hiding it from themselves. These peoples saw no repercussions to their sins, so they continued sinning, as if God hid the system of justice from them. God’s Creation “hides,” not immediately revealing, reward and punishment. For if God immediately struck every sinner with lightning, man would no longer possess free will. Man would abstain from sin due to fear of imminent death, and not due to a reasoned consideration of sin’s harm. Thus, man’s mind would be disengaged: the opposite of God’s plan in granting each human an intellect.


“God stored the light away until the future for the righteous people” means the righteous alone will enjoy God’s justice. King David said, “Were it not that I believed I will see God’s goodness in the land of the living (Psalm 27).” King David was troubled by enemies. This is of course disturbing and would rightfully cause one to despise such a tortured existence. “Land of the living” refers to the afterlife, and David expressed that his knowledge of his ultimate state in the afterlife was what kept him going. He knew that ultimately, justice would be served to all souls.

This also explains why the term “vayaas” is not applied to the “light”: that light was not a physical creation molded from primordial matter like the sun. That light refers to knowledge...knowledge of God’s system of justice, and reward and punishment. God created this system of truths on Day One, this was the “light.”

## SUMMARY

Creation finds purpose in humans who accept God’s authority and justice. Ibn Ezra describes Adam as a “chocham gadol” – a great intellect (Gen. 2:16). Adam was able to “see” (metaphorically) “from one end of the world to the other.” Meaning, Adam understood not only the natural world, but the world of God’s government of man: metaphysics. The generations of the Flood and the Dispersion, violated God. The former was annihilated and the latter was scattered over the Earth. Sodom too was destroyed as they violated God’s system of justice and righteousness. Conversely, God gave fame and success to Abraham who rejected idolatry and taught monotheism. And God eventually saved his descendants from Egypt, and gave them a Torah (Bible) to study, and share with the world.

Rabbi Eliezer does not reject that there was physical light created on Day Three. His point was to highlight a purposeful Biblical hint that teaches a truth concerning Creation: knowledge of God and subservience to Him is a primary purpose in His Creation, and this was the “light” created on Day One. This is a powerful message about God’s objective in creating the universe. ■



In this week's parsha, Chayei Sarah, the lives of our founding parents, Avraham and Sarah, come to an end. They were spiritual giants who introduced the world to a radically new concept of G-d and the manner in which man should relate to Him.

They were extremely wise and compassionate people who displayed concern and friendship for all people. Avraham and Sarah did not wait for others to come to them, but were proactive in extending a hand to fellow humans. In fact, their concern extended to generations that would arise long after they were gone. The key word in their religious lexicon was perpetuation. They longed for a son who would assume the mantle of Avraham's leadership after he was gone.

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# Chayei Sarah

## Avraham's Approach to Marriage

*A Lesson in  
Priorities*

RABBI REUVEN MANN

This was so important that Sarah gave her servant, Hagar, to Avraham as a wife, for the purpose of procreation. Hagar bore him a son, but this “triumph” went to her head and engendered a haughty attitude toward her mistress. Because of this, Hashem decided that the continuity of the Abrahamic movement required a leader who was the child of the founders and miraculously enabled Sarah to bear a son at the age of 90.

When Sarah died, Avraham secured the Cave of Machpelah in Hebron as a family burial plot. He then turned his attention to the future. It was essential to find a proper wife for Yitzchak so he could continue his parents’ leadership role.

Finding the proper shidduch (match) was no simple matter. He categorically rejected all Canaanite girls. That society was so morally corrupt that the Torah would warn the Jews not to emulate the practices of the Land they were about to inherit. Instead, he sent his trusted servant, Eliezer, to return to Haran, where Avraham was born, to select a suitable mate for Yitzchak.

In preparation for this mission, the Torah records a fascinating dialogue between Eliezer and Avraham. The servant had a daunting task: to somehow discover a maiden with the appropriate character and virtues that would enable her to assume the role of Sarah.

That, however, was not the most challenging aspect. Avraham demanded that the girl leave her family and homeland and join Yitzchak in Canaan.

Eliezer realized how much resistance this demand would encounter. What family would part with their young daughter, never to see her again? He asked, suppose I find the right girl, but she refuses to abandon her land and kinsmen? Should I then bring Yitzchak to Haran to get married and live there?

Avraham responded firmly and unequivocally. Under no circumstances was his son to leave Canaan



and go to Haran. If the suitable young lady was unwilling to come to Yitzchak’s country, then he should abandon the shidduch.

At first glance, Eliezer’s position seems to make more sense. He was searching for a unique woman of great wisdom and impeccable character. She also had to be especially beautiful, as was Sarah.

Such people are few and far between. Thus, if he were to discover such a special person and, for some reason, she could not make the journey to Canaan would it not make sense for Yitzchak to move to her land?

But no, Avraham was very explicit in his rejection of his servant’s thinking. What was the reasoning behind his stance?

In my opinion, Avraham had an unconventional attitude toward marriage. For him, obtaining a proper marital bond was not an end in itself. Many people regard a loving relationship as the highest good and the very purpose of existence. For Avraham, it was important, but only insofar as it facilitated one’s true existential purpose.

Yitzchak’s life purpose was to continue the Abrahamic movement and build upon the pioneering accomplishments of his illustrious father. He was to continue to study Torah and “call out in the name of Hashem.” He was to inform all people of the existence of the true G-d and the moral lifestyle He requires of man. This could only be done in Canaan.

Thus, Avraham told Eliezer, in no uncertain terms, that Yitzchak could not compromise on his divinely ordained life’s mission, even at the expense of finding a “perfect” shidduch.

Because his career fulfilled the will of Hashem, Avraham had great faith that Eliezer would receive providential assistance in accomplishing his task.

This is quite relevant to Jews today, especially in light of the perceived “shidduch crisis.” We should first determine what we want to achieve with our lives and then search for the spouse who will most help us to attain our objective. Shared values, ideals, and goals are the basis of a truly harmonious and successful union. May we merit to achieve it!

Shabbat shalom ■



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# Abraham & the Angels

VAYERAH

Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim



**O**ne must repeatedly revisit Torah portions to uncover God's numerous lessons. What catches our attention during our first few reads of a given area, often obscures other questions and insights. However, if we follow the halacha of reading each weekly portion twice yearly, and we are fortunate, new questions arise leading to new discoveries. I will address this account of Abraham and the angels, following God's words that all prophets excluding Moses received prophecy only while unconscious.[1]

Three angels visit Abraham. We read five times how fast Abraham "ran" and "hurried" to prepare a meal for these guests, described as men. What is God's intent in, 1) giving a vision to Abraham that highlights Abraham's kindness to people, and 2) repeating how fast and attentively Abraham served them? Since God ultimately discusses directly with Abraham the justice of Sodom, of what purpose is this vision of the three men?

Only one angel appears required for this vision, since only its news of Isaac's

forthcoming birth was announced. The other two angels were silent the entire visit and could have initially "arrived"[2] at Sodom. The Rabbis teach that the other two angels had the respective missions of destroying Sodom and saving Lote. This being the case, there was no need for them to accompany the angel assigned with the mission of the birth announcement. What then was the purpose of the two other angels visiting Abraham?

One angel asked Abraham, "Where is Sarah your wife?" We would assume this was intended to call her to share the news. But this did not occur. As Abraham responded, "She is in the tent", the angel then announced only to Abraham the news of Isaac. Why then did the angel inquire of Sarah's whereabouts? It appears inconsequential. The Torah then tells us that Sarah "in fact" heard, as she was behind the angels. She denied her ability to become pregnant at ninety years old. God then ridicules Sarah addressing Abraham, "Is anything impossible for God?" As Abraham was alone in communion with God, what purpose was served by God including Sarah's words in this created vision? (Although this was Abraham's vision, God accurately depicts Sarah's true feelings, which no doubt, Abraham discussed with Sarah in his waking state subsequent to this prophecy. For she too would be instrumental in transmitting God's justice. Alternatively, Sarah might have very well participated in this prophecy; similar to when God gave a joint prophecy to Miriam, Aaron and Moses [Num. 12:4].)

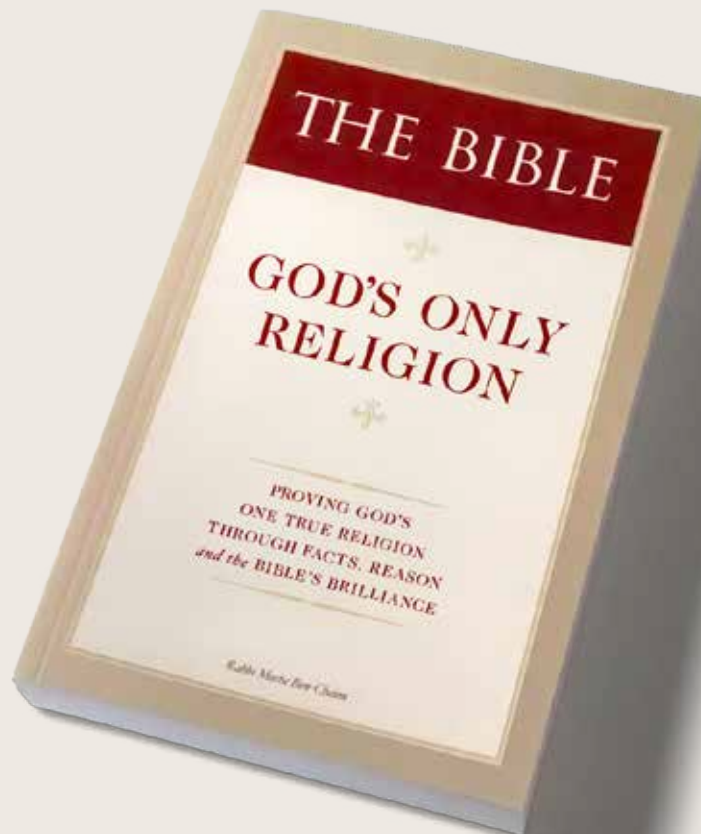
This is followed by the angels "gazing at Sodom", but not yet leaving. Their departure is suddenly delayed, and interrupted by

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# Religions conflict; they all can't be God's word. How do we choose which is God's true religion?

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Sodom's Destruction



God's following consideration:

*"Shall I keep hidden from Abraham what I plan to do? And Abraham will surely become a great, mighty nation, and all nations of the land will be blessed due to him. For he is beloved on account that he will command his children and his household after him, and they will guard the path of God, performing charity and justice, so that God will bring upon Abraham what He has spoken. And God said [to Abraham], 'The cry of Sodom and Amora is great and their sin is greatly heavy. I will descend and see if in accordance with their cry that comes to Me I will annihilate them; and if not, I know' (Gen. 18:17-21)."*

Following God's words, we read in the very next verse (ibid 18:22) that the angels then left to Sodom. Again, the angels gazing towards Sodom should be immediately followed by their leaving. What is the meaning behind God's words above interrupting the angels' departure? And what is God's message here?

### Abraham's Concern for Man

Why the emphasis of Abraham "running" and "hurrying" the meal preparations? Abraham was having a vision, and to him, he was relating to men, not angels, as the verses state. Abraham had a keen sense of kindness, and wished to give honor to his

fellow man. One can serve others, but if he runs to serve them, this expresses the height of honoring others, as we see regarding Rivka "running" to draw water for Eliezer's camels (Gen. 24:20). One feels more appreciated when another person runs to assist them, and does not merely walk. Abraham wanted to make the three men feel as appreciated as possible. Abraham prized human dignity. Typically, a leader seeks honor. But the perfected leader views all others as equals, and even forgoes personal rights and feelings to accommodate others. But why was this part of the vision God created? How is this related to Abraham learning God's justice?

Men such as Abraham, who are genuinely concerned for his fellow, and who teach others God's ways of "charity and justice" (Gen. 18:19) will be the recipient of greater knowledge in this area. God therefore teaches Abraham not only His ways, but also, that man (Abraham) earns this knowledge due to his acts of kindness to his fellow. Thus, Abraham sees himself showing kindness to the three men, and this is followed by God's dialogue on Sodom's justice. God says in other words, "Abraham, due to your kindness, justice and concern for mankind, I am revealing greater knowledge with you on how My true kindness and justice operate."

### Angels

Angels are not omniscient; they are God's metaphysical agents to perform events on Earth. As King David said, "He makes His angels winds; His ministers [He makes as] blazing flames (Psalms 104:4)." Each angel controls a particular sphere within natural law, and nothing outside that law. As Rashi taught, "...one angel does not perform two missions (Gen. 18:2)." We also read, "And the angel of God that went before the Jewish camp traveled, and it went behind them; and the pillar of cloud that went before them traveled and stood behind them (Exod. 14:19)." There is no redundancy. This verse teaches a fundamental: there are two entities: 1) the metaphysical angel, and 2) the physical entity (here, a cloud) over which God places the angel as a supervisor. God controls nature through an angel, charging the angel over a specific sphere of nature; here, the specific task of repositioning the cloud to protect the Jews from the approaching Egyptian army. Thus, angels themselves are not physical, but they control physical phenomena. This explains why this verse describes the angel traveling, and then again, the cloud traveling. We are taught that the angel controls the cloud. And angels only control the sphere of laws determined by God. Thus, the angel did not know where Sarah was and needed to ask, since this knowledge

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was outside its specific sphere of control. Yet, the angel somehow knew Sarah's name. This I believe further proves that this story was a vision. For if it were a literal event and these three were men and not angels, they could not know Sarah's name.

The angel did not intend to share the birth announcement with Sarah. It is my opinion that it was ascertaining that Sarah was not in earshot of this announcement. The angel's inquiry "Where is Sarah your wife?" is understood as ensuring she did not hear the birth announcement. Why? I believe this teaches another lesson about God's justice. For it was Abraham who taught monotheism and God's justice to his children and mankind (Gen. 18:18). Therefore, the news of Isaac's birth — the son who would continue Abraham's legacy — related primarily to Abraham, and not Sarah.

### The Vision

This entire vision dealt with God's justice. Justice is not merely the destruction of evildoers. A primary aspect of God's justice is educating man about His ways. Therefore, the two other angels, although silent the entire time, came along with the announcing angel to convey a relationship between all three angels. Isaac's birth was vital to continue Abraham's teachings, and the destruction of Sodom and Lote's salvation comprise important lessons on God's justice, the very substance of Abraham's teachings. Thus, all three angels' missions related to Abraham, and therefore were all part of this vision.

### The Interruption: God's Dialogue with Abraham

God's will is to teach man. The angels were about to leave to Sodom, but not quite yet. First, God shares with Abraham a clue to greater knowledge of God's justice. This knowledge would have been "hidden" from mankind — "Hamichaseh ani may'Avraham (Gen. 18:17)" — had God not suggested to Abraham that although exceedingly great in sin, Sodom might be salvaged if certain conditions were met. God knew there were not 10 righteous people, and therefore the angels proceeded to destroy Sodom, prior to Abraham's dialogue with God. But the message of the angels not departing to Sodom until God commenced a dialogue with Abraham indicates that the angel's mission of destruction played a

great role in Abraham's knowledge of God's justice. So we can read the verses as follows: God is about to destroy Sodom (the angels gaze at Sodom) but God first shares knowledge of His justice before doing so. Once this dialogue ensues, the destruction can take place, and Abraham will attain greater knowledge. Again, God's dialogue is inserted between the angels' gaze towards Sodom and their departure for Sodom, conveying a relationship between Sodom's destruction and Abraham learning God's justice.

### Sarah

What purpose did Sarah serve in this vision? The Torah makes it clear that Sarah viewed natural law as absolute, "After I have aged, will I truly give birth (Gen. 18:14)?" Thus, God's response, "Is anything too wondrous for God (Gen. 18:14)?" The lesson to Abraham by God's inclusion of this scenario within the vision is this: knowledge of God's justice must include the idea that God's justice is absolute. Nothing, not even nature overrides God's justice. This is expressed throughout Torah in the many miracles God performed to benefit righteous people. As God was teaching Abraham new insights into His justice, this lesson was of critical value.

### Summary

God gives Abraham a vision intended to further educate him on His ways, and for him to teach his son Isaac and the world. But God only does so, since Abraham was perfected in his concern for man. Abraham is taught through the vision that this concern is what earned him new insights from God. The other two angels visiting Abraham, and the interruption of the angels' departure by God's dialogue, teaches that man's knowledge of God's justice is a primary purpose in His meting out of justice. Thus, the angels did not leave to destroy Sodom until Abraham was engaged in learning a new insight into God's justice in this destruction. Abraham also learns that God's justice is absolute, expressed in God's rebuke of Sarah.

### Addendum

Although it is suggested that Abraham was pleading with God for the salvation of Sodom, the verses do not suggest this. I say

this due to the absence of Abraham mentioning "selicha" or "mechila," meaning to forgive. It is my opinion that Abraham accepted God's decree, and was inquiring for his edification, what exactly are God's measures of justice. In contrast, Moses poses arguments to God that once He selected the Jewish nation, favored by His salvation, annihilation of the Jews would cast shame on God. This was not the case regarding Sodom. ■

[1] "...If there will be prophets of God; in a vision to him I will make Myself known; in a dream I will speak to him. Not so is it with My servant Moses; in all My house he is trusted. Face to face I speak with him and in vision and not with riddles; and the form of God he beholds... (Num. 12:6-8)."

[2] I say "arrived", but in no manner do I suggest that angels are an earthly phenomenon. Rather, as I elaborated within this essay, that the two other angels could have "addressed" God's will for Sodom without connection with the announcing angel. (Similarly, the angels of God addressed God's will that the pillar of cloud relocate behind the Jews. But angels are not on Earth; only the cloud is. See Maimonides' Guide for the Perplexed, book II, end of chapter 6.)

# The Fantasy of Immortality

CHAYEI SARAH

Rabbi Dr. Darrell Ginsberg



**P**arshas Chayei Sarah is bookended by two very monumental events in Jewish history – the death of Sarah and the death of Avraham, signifying the first transition of yehadus from one generation to the next. Much of the beginning of the parsha deals with both the reaction of Avraham to Sarah's death, as well as the steps Avraham went through to secure her burial place, Maaras Hamachpela. At the end of the parsha, Avraham's death is recorded, but as compared to the description of the death of Sarah is quite subdued (Bereishis 25:7-8):

*"These are the days of the years of Avraham which he lived, one hundred years, seventy years and five years. Avraham expired and died in a good old age, old and satisfied, and he was gathered to his people."*

The juxtaposition of his being old and being satisfied is taken up by the Ramban:

*"He witnessed the fulfillment of all the desires of his heart and was sated with all good things. In a similar sense is [the verse written in connection with Isaac's life], 'and full of days', which means that his soul was sated with days, and he had no desire that the future days should bring something new. This is as it is said of David: 'And he dies in a good old age, full of days, riches and honor'. This is a story of the chessed of the Eternal towards the righteous ones, and of their attribute of goodness by virtue of which they do not desire luxuries, just as it is said of them, 'You have given him his heart's desire', and not as it is said of other people, 'He that loves money shall not be satisfied with money', and as the Rabbis have commented thereon: 'No man leaves the world having amassed half of his desires. If he has a hundred, he desires two hundred, if he succeeds in acquiring two hundred, he desires to make of it four hundred...'"*

At first glance, this seems to be a deserving praise of Avraham Avinu. But there are a few points made by the Ramban that require clarification. For one, the implication is that Avraham did not want to live longer, derived from the statement of "his soul was sated with days." Why not? It is senseless to imagine he had a fantasy of immortality. To live just another day would mean another opportunity to engage in yediya Hashem, to possibly uncover a new idea, maybe effectuate an ideological change in someone's life. Why would Avraham not naturally desire this chance? And isn't this the idea of a future day bringing something new, something the Ramban seems to indicate Avraham rejected, a positive idea?

There is also the implication that it is an act of chessed by God to allow a tzadik to lack a desire for more than he has received. Yet one could ask, isn't this very attitude the product of the tzadik's internal choosing? Ultimately, he is making the decision to pursue and desire. What exactly is the chessed of God here? Finally, there is the question of the analogy between a person's death and the concept that one who loves money is never satisfied. This analogy needs to be understood in greater depth.

As mentioned above, one can safely assume that this explanation is introduced here to negate the thought that Avraham had a fantasy of immortality. However, there is one fundamental idea being brought to light in this piece. There are moments in life where we come face to face with our own mortality. More often than not, these reflections emerge from unforeseen events. A car accident, a diagnosis of illness, a close brush with death – all are unexpected, to say the least. Yet it would also seem that there is one moment, when a person has reached a much later age – zakein – where death seems not so far off anymore. And more often than not, at this stage, the fear of this unavoidable end kicks in. Faced with this fear, a person seeks to avoid death at all costs, and the emotion of immortality becomes prominent. The first idea we see from Avraham is that he did want to live longer – every new day would be another

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chance to study God. However, Avraham did not fear death, and therefore he had no fantasy of immortality.

This leads us to the second point being expressed by the Ramban. The analogy, explained by the Ramban, seems to link the desire for more days to the desire for money, which is insatiable. What the Ramban might be alluding to is an important idea. There are many reasons why a person feels the need, when faced with his fear of death, to be immortal. One of these is directly tied to the experiences of the physical world. The idea of money, or any physical pursuit, never being one that is completely satisfied is the very “trap” the world of the instinctual sets for its “prey”. Indeed, for the average person, it is never enough. So what does he do? What pulls him back in time and again? The fantasy that the next batch of money will bring ultimate satisfaction. Within this fallacy lies the link to immortality. One part of a person’s fantasy of immortality is that a longer life would be another opportunity to finally fulfill those stubborn, elusive fantasies—complete the bucket list, so to speak. The very fantasy itself serves as a vehicle for more of the same. This helps explain the analogy. The Ramban is telling us that the desire to live forever exists on one level as a means of trying to fulfill the unattainable satisfaction from the physical world. However, we see quite the opposite with Avraham. It was not just that he did not fear death. Avraham died free of conflict between his psyche and his mind, his needs from the physical world fulfilled. He related to the physical world in the proper way, where the enjoyments exist not for their own sake, but to help him in his pursuit of yediyas Hashem. Therefore, there was no desire to live longer, as there was no fantasy to fulfill.

This leads us to the final point. When a person is on this derech, where he understands how the physical world can never provide ultimate satisfaction – the tzadik referred to here by the Ramban – he merits a certain type of hashgacha from God. Whereas the specifics cannot be known, one can assume that God will assist the individual through the world of cause and effect. This is the chessed spoken of by the Ramban, reserved for these unique individuals who are able to attain this exalted level of perfection. ■



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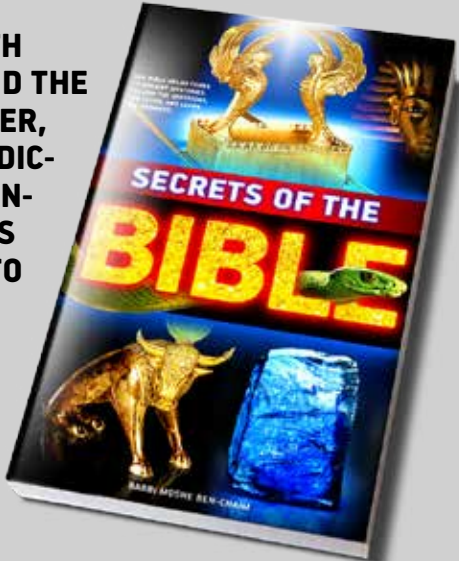
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## CHAYE SARAH

# Paradigms of Love: A Discussion of Various Views on the Nature of Ahavat Hashem

Rabbi Bernie Fox

It is my pleasure and honor to submit the following article on the occasion of publication of the 500th issue of The Jewishtimes. I composed this article specifically for this edition of The Jewishtimes and in honor of its founder and editor, Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim. I appreciate the opportunity to contribute to this publication and share Torah thoughts with its readers. Congratulations to Rabbi Ben-Chaim on achieving this remarkable milestone. I join with the readers of and contributors to The Jewishtimes in wishing Rabbi Ben-Chaim many more years of success in this and in all of his endeavors.

But you, Yisrael My servant, Ya'akov whom I have chosen, the seed of Avraham, who loved Me, (Sefer Yishayahu 41:8)

### AVRAHAM'S UNIQUE STATUS

Parshat Chaye Sarah completes the Torah's discussion of our patriarch Avraham. In the above passage Hashem, speaking through the prophet Yishayahu – Isaiah, describes Avraham as the one who loved Him. Maimonides notes that this description is significant. He explains that in its most exemplary form, serving Hashem is as an expression of love for Him – ahavat Hashem. In other words, one whose service of Hashem is motivated by love of Him, serves at the highest level. He explains that this level is not easily achieved even by the wise and righteous.<sup>1</sup> Hashem's description of Avraham as one who loved Him reflects a remarkable achievement by Avraham.

This raises an important question. What is love of Hashem? In other words, we are familiar with various forms of love. Love can be romantic. Love exists between a parent and child and among the members of a family. Love also exists between friends. Is ahavat Hashem a variation of one of these forms of

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love or is it a different and unique form of love? In order to understand the full significance and meaning of Hashem's description of Avraham as the one who loved Him we must explore this issue; we must understand the meaning of loving Hashem.

And you shall love Hashem, your L-rd, with all your heart and with all your soul, and with all your means. (Sefer Devarim 6:5)

## FOUNDATIONS FOR LOVE OF HASHEM

This issue is important for a more fundamental reason. In the above passage, we are commanded to love Hashem.<sup>2</sup> If we are to fulfill this commandment, then we must understand the nature of this love. We cannot fulfill a commandment until we understand what is commanded to us.

Rav Eliezer Papo (1785-1826) discusses the nature of ahavat Hashem in his work *Pele Yoetz*. He explains that love of Hashem can derive from various sources. The most basic or minimal form of ahavat Hashem derives from an appreciation of His kindness to us as our provider. It expresses our recognition of His benevolence toward us. Rav Papo regards this form of ahavat Hashem as minimal because it is fundamentally selfish. One's love of Hashem is derived from love of oneself. It is because one has benefited from Hashem's gifts that the person loves Him.

At the next and somewhat higher level, ahavat Hashem is a response to the opportunity to serve Him. This love focuses upon recognition that Hashem is Creator and the L-rd of the entire universe in which we are inconsequential creations. Nonetheless, Hashem has selected us and provides us with the opportunity to be His servants. Self-interest does underlie this love. Like the previous level, it is a response to Hashem's benevolence expressed in His selection of us to be His servants. Yet, this love represents a higher level of person perfection. It is based upon both recognition of the greatness of Hashem and personal humility. However, this is not the highest form of ahavat Hashem.

The highest form of ahavat Hashem is a response to recognition of His perfection. Rav Papo does not elaborate on this final form of ahavat Hashem. He limits his remarks to commenting on Hashem's perfection and explains that one who truly appreciates this perfection will respond to it with love of Hashem.

What is the path [to attain] love and fear of Him? When a person contemplates His wondrous and great deeds and creations and appreciates His infinite wisdom that surpasses all comparison, he will immediately love, praise, and glorify [Him], yearning with tremendous desire to know [Hashem's] great name, as David stated: "My soul thirsts for the L-rd, for the living G-d" [Sefer Tehilim 42:3]. (Maimonides, Mishne Torah, Hilchot Yesodai HaTorah 2:2)

One can only love God [as an outgrowth] of the knowledge with which he knows Him. The nature of one's love depends on the nature of one's knowledge! A small [amount of knowledge arouses] a lesser love. A greater amount of knowledge arouses a greater love. (Maimonides, Hilchot Teshuvah 10:6)

## LOVE OF HASHEM BASED UPON KNOWLEDGE

Rav Papo's comments contrast with the position articulated above by Maimonides. Rav Papo describes three forms of ahavat Hashem. Maimonides asserts that there is only one form of love of Hashem. This love is achieved through the study of His works and recognition of the infinite wisdom that they reflect. Furthermore, the intensity of one's love for Hashem is proportionate to one's knowledge. The greater one's knowledge, the more intense will be one's love.

In short, Rav Papo describes three types of ahavat Hashem. Each derives from its own unique source. The lowest level is a response to Hashem's benevolence as our provider. The intermediate level is an expression of appreciation for the remarkable opportunity to serve the Creator and L-rd of the universe. The highest level is a response to one's recognition of Hashem's perfection.

In contrast, Maimonides dismisses these first two levels of love of Hashem. He recognizes only a love that derives from a recognition of Hashem's perfection or more specifically a recognition of His infinite wisdom. Furthermore, whereas Rav Papo does not discuss from where one derives this recognition of Hashem's perfection, Maimonides is very specific. The recognition is derived from study of the works of Hashem – the universe He created and the Torah He revealed to us.

This discussion suggests a basic question. Why does Maimonides reject Rav Papo's position? Rav Papo's position seems very reasonable. His premise is that love of Hashem must be based upon some real foundation. There are various foundations that meet with criterion. One who loves Hashem in response to His benevolence is experiencing a love based upon reality. This is also true of one whose love is a

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response to the remarkable opportunity to serve Hashem. Why does Maimonides dismiss these forms of love of Hashem?

For I have known him because he commands his sons and his household after him, that they should keep the way of Hashem to perform righteousness and justice, in order that Hashem bring upon Avraham that which He spoke concerning him. (Sefer Beresheit 18:19)

## THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN LOVE AND KNOWLEDGE

There are two aspects of Maimonides' concept of ahavat Hashem that seem to explain his position. The above passage alludes to the first of these aspects. In this passage, Hashem explains that He will reveal to Avraham His intention to judge the people of Sedom and – if they are found guilty – to destroy them. Hashem says that He will share His intentions with him because Avraham will direct his children and descendants to follow the ways of Hashem and to conduct themselves with righteousness and justice.

Commenting on this passage, Rashi explains that the phrase "I have known him" communicates love and affection. In other words, Hashem is saying that He loves Avraham. He will reveal to him His intentions as an expression of this love.<sup>3</sup> Rashi's comments are based upon a nuance of biblical Hebrew. The term "know" is often used to communicate love or intimacy. This usage is not accidental and deserves some consideration.

Love can derive from different sources. It can be a response to fantasy. An example of this type of love is "love at first sight". Such love is not based upon knowledge of its object. Instead, it is founded upon one's fantasies concerning the object of the love. At best, these fantasies are misleading and at worst, they can lead to a disastrous relationship. The reason for this is simple. One who pursues such a love is enamored by a person that exist only in the imagination. The actual person toward whom one's love and attention is directed is not the person depicted by the imagination.

Alternatively, love can be a response to understanding and appreciation. This love can only emerge when one deeply knows another. From that knowledge and understanding a sincere appreciation develops. The use of the term "know" to communicate love often refers to love built upon this foundation. It is this love that Hashem declares for Avraham.

Maimonides' position is that ahavat Hashem must be based upon knowledge of Hashem. The aspect of

Hashem that is clearly accessible to human grasp is knowledge of His wisdom. Therefore, Maimonides asserts that true ahavat Hashem is founded upon the study His works and an appreciation of the infinite wisdom that they express.<sup>4</sup>

What is the proper [degree] of love? That a person should love Hashem with a very great and exceeding love until his soul is bound up in the love of Hashem. Thus, he will always be obsessed with this love as if he is lovesick. [A lovesick person's] thoughts are never diverted from the love of that woman. He is always obsessed with her; when he sits down, when he gets up, when he eats and drinks. With an even greater [love], the love for Hashem should be [implanted] in the hearts of those who love Him and are obsessed with Him at all times as we are commanded [Deuteronomy 6:5] "Love Hashem..." with all your heart and with all soul." (Maimonides, Mishne Torah, Hilchot Teshuvah 10:3)

## LOVE OF HASHEM COMPARED TO ROMANTIC LOVE

The second aspect of Maimonides' understanding of ahavat Hashem that is relevant to our discussion is explained in the above comment. Maimonides describes ahavat Hashem as a displacement of the self. One's focus upon and concern for oneself is replaced with an overwhelming desire to be close to Hashem. Maimonides compares this aspect of ahavat Hashem to romantic love. A similar displacement of the self is characteristic of intense romantic love. Yet, he declares that they are not exactly equivalent. Romantic love cannot achieve the intensity of ahavat Hashem.

Before we can bring this discussion to its conclusion, we must understand this declaration. Why does ahavat Hashem – when fully experienced – achieve an intensity that surpasses that of romantic love?

The answer lies in the relationship between the two aspects of ahavat Hashem that Maimonides has developed. The object of romantic love is imagined as perfect. But this is not reality. In some ways the beloved will be imperfect and those imperfections will temper the intensity of one's infatuation. Ahavat Hashem does not have this feature; Hashem does not disappoint. Because ahavat Hashem is based upon knowledge and an appreciation of the infinite wisdom of Hashem, there is no threat of disappointment. Instead, the greater one's knowledge and one's familiarity with Hashem's infinite wisdom, the more intense the love.

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## THE UNIQUENESS OF LOVE OF HASHEM

Now, we can understand the fundamental difference between the views of Maimonides and Rav Papo. Rav Papo understands love of Hashem as the redirecting toward Hashem of the human capacity to love. It is an expression of the type of love with which we are familiar. However, it differs from this love in that its object is not another human being. The beloved is Hashem.

Maimonides rejects this perspective. He regards ahavat Hashem as unique. We refer to it as love because it is analogous or similar to our mundane encounters with love. But is different from the love shared by human-beings. It is based solely upon knowledge. No element of fantasy is present. Its intensity and consequential capacity to displace one's focus on the self is unmatched. It can only grow with more familiarity with the beloved – Hashem.

Avraham's service of Hashem was an expression of his perfect love of Hashem. His service was the result of complete devotion to and infatuation with his beloved. It is this remarkable achievement that prompted Hashem to describe Avraham as "the one who loved Me". ■

## FOOTNOTES

1. Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Mishne Torah, Hilchot Teshuvah 10:2.

2. Maimonides explains that even the wise and righteous do not easily achieve the level of Avraham – service of Hashem motivated by love. Yet, the commandment to love Hashem is directed to every individual. Can there be a commandment that we are each directed to observe but cannot be achieved by everyone? Rav Yisrael Chait commented on this issue. He suggested that the commandments are more than the set of directives. Collectively, they represent a blueprint of perfection that encompasses the individual and the community. As a

blueprint, they include all of the elements of the perfected individual. Our personal incapacity to fulfill a particular commandment cannot be a criterion for excluding an element that is clearly essential to perfection.

However, it is possible that Maimonides maintains that the commandment to love Hashem is accessible to and can be fulfilled by every individual – at some level. In his discussion of the achievement of Avraham, Maimonides is not describing his fulfillment of the commandment to love Hashem. He is discussing the phenomenon of service of Hashem motivated purely by love. In other words, he is not suggesting that only a few very special individuals can achieve love of Hashem. He is commenting on an expression of this love – its expression as the sole motivation for service of Hashem. His message is that although we are all commanded to love Hashem, only very special individuals are able to serve Hashem without any motivation of self-interest but rather purely as an expression of this love.

3. Rabbaynu Shlomo ben Yitzchak (Rashi), Commentary on Sefer Beresheit 18:19.

4. Rav Papo's first two levels of ahavat Hashem and perhaps even his third level are not expressions of love in response to knowledge. In discussing the third and highest level, Rav Papo does not elaborate upon the source of one's perception of Hashem's perfection. This suggests that Rav Papo would not distinguish between perception based upon study and personal knowledge and perception based upon general tradition but lacking understanding of the nature of this perfection.

The first two levels are responses to some aspect of Hashem's benevolence. The person loves Hashem as his benefactor and will inevitably have some perception of the nature of this benefactor. However, because the perception is not based upon study and knowledge, this perception can only be the product of the imagination.

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