



JewishTimes

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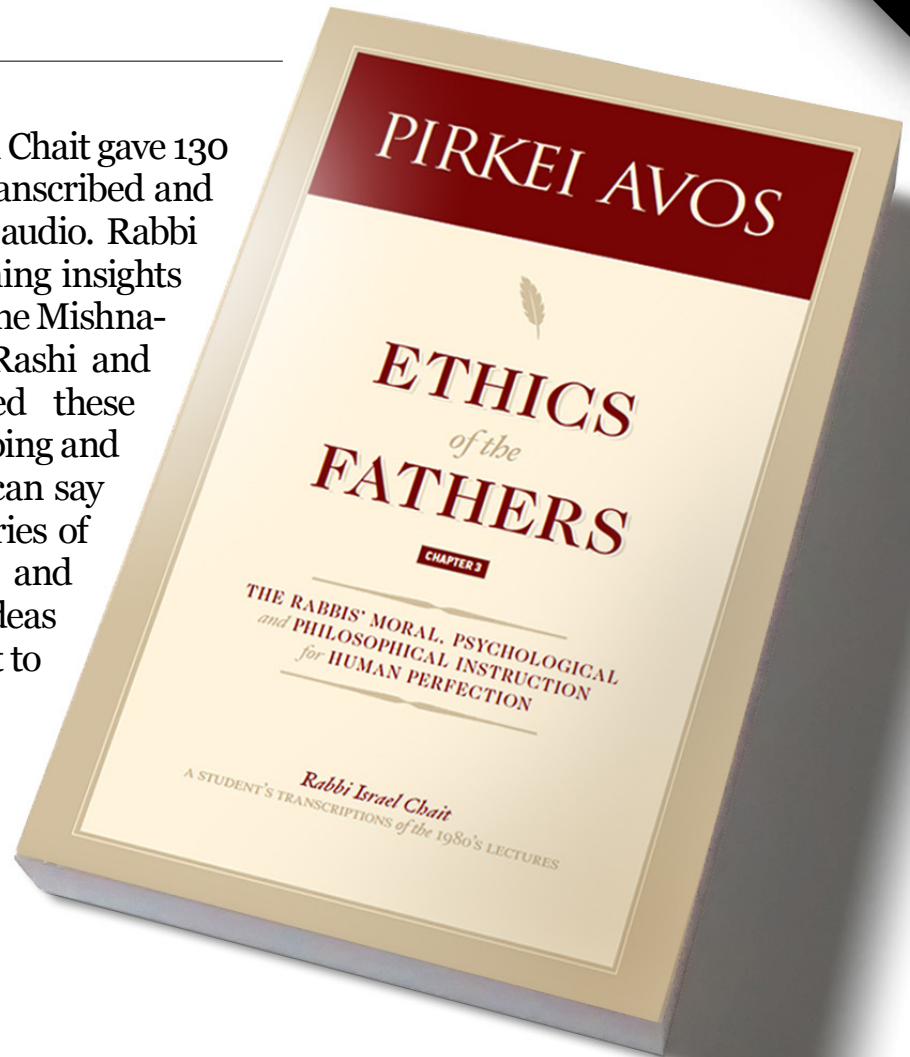
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## LETTERS

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

## Maimonides' First Principle

**Reader:** Greetings to you. I have a question regarding Maimonides and his 13 principles. Basically, my question boils down to this: What is the first principle?

Some sources — such as the Jewish Virtual Library — seem to indicate the first principle is nothing more than “God exists.” Admittedly, this does seem to be pretty primary in the structure of monotheistic faith, so it is an apt first principle.

However, other sources — such as Chabad — appear to posit something more along the lines of “God is the Creator” or “God is the (First) cause of existence.” Your own website seems to concur with this interpretation of the first axiom of Maimonides.

Maybe I'm making a fuss about nothing; but to me, “God exists” and “God is the Creator” are two very distinct assertions. Moreover, the differences between one online source and another in portraying the first principle of Maimonides makes the matter quite confusing to me. Therefore, I'd appreciate your own clarification in this matter.

Thank you.

Sincerely,  
Lance

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## CREATION

# The World

## Biblical Clues for its Purpose

Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim

### IN THE BEGINNING, GOD CREATED THE HEAVEN AND THE EARTH

As creation and Torah are intended for mankind's study, to acquire knowledge of God, to find the utmost delight in the discovery of God's brilliance, and to attain human perfection, all that is found in creation and Torah must target these objectives. Astronomical (heaven) and geographic (Earth) knowledge must teach something more than mere science; how is human nature perfected through this study? While it is true that man needs to know that all that exists—heaven and Earth—are creations of God alone, and that there exists nothing other than God, can we ask why the main categories of creation are identified as “heaven and Earth,” as opposed to stating, “In the beginning, God created the universe—ha’olam?” There is a precedent for this: our first daily prayer —Baruch She’amar—reads, “Blessed is the One who spoke, and the universe came into being.” What is it about Creation that demands that “heaven and Earth” be isolated, and not “universe?”

I wonder if these two are related to an intriguing fact: God gives names to only five phenomena. On day one, God called light “day,” and darkness He called “night.” On day two He called the firmament “heavens” and on day three He called the dry Earth “land,” and the collection of waters He called “seas.”

God does not name the substance of water, mountains, the sun, moon, stars, man, animals, vegetation or any other creation. Interestingly, these five names relate again to heaven (day, night, heavens) and Earth (land and seas). Furthermore, these are prioritized: addressed first before all other creations. And what is the concept of “naming” one thing and not another: Is the named thing thereby highlighted as more significant, and if so, in what manner?

“And it was evening and it was morning, day X,” is repeated many times. Why this emphasis of night transitioning into day? Primarily, what is the purpose of day and night? What in man's path towards perfection demands this regulated transition between light and darkness?

These phenomena of light and darkness are highlighted by the daily blessings of the Shima:

*Blessed are you God, King of the world, forming light and creating darkness...*

*Blessed are you God, King of the world, with His word He sunsets the evenings...with understanding He changes times, and exchanges the moments...creating day and night, You expire day and bring night, and divide between day and night...*

These blessings emphasize light and darkness, day and night. There are many purposes to God's creations. Light and darkness teamed with Earth spinning on its axis and revolving around the sun affects temperature, weather, and seasons. But perhaps man too is affected psychologically by the phenomena of “day” and “night”: God giving alternate names to light and darkness—“day and night”—suggest an additional concept.

### Day and Night

God wished a unique reality to exist, and affect man's emotional makeup, and ultimately his soul. These purposeful divisions of time are not simply light and darkness, but “day and night.” What is the difference? Light and darkness are ocular phenomena: biological perceptions. However, day and night are the units with which man experiences his present. The present is man's reality. Man attributes greater reality to the “now” which he senses, than to the past or future that do not exist. Man infuses ambition into his present. He is driven naturally to sustain himself, and to preserve and dignify his life. “Day” provides that screen onto which man projects his hopes and dreams and realize his ambitions. If day were to never cease, if night never came, man might never recoil from his pursuits. Day regularly transitioning into night forces man's realization of the passing of time from days, to weeks, to months and to years. The initial generations of man were very large and enjoyed lifespans nearing 1000 years which fostered an invincibility that fed their arrogance and violence and disregard for others. God cured those generations of evildoers with the Flood, and by subsequently reducing man's stature, and longevity. Immortality fantasies were dashed. Grasping time's passing is a blessing. Perhaps the very design of day and night are integral to God's plan for the Earth—a domain created for man to perfect himself. Day and night are a ticking clock that enables man to release himself from immortality fantasies, realizing this world's Designer and humbling himself before His will, for man's own good.

*When I behold Your heavens, the work of Your fingers, the moon and stars that You set in place, what is man that You have been mindful of him, mortal man that You have taken note of him? (Psalms 8:4,5).*

(CONT. ON NEXT PAGE)

King David marveled at the heavens. There is a vast humiliating contrast: heaven's endless expanse that dwarfs earthbound man. Even one as great as King David—the author of the most poetic praises—was speechless when beholding this contrast and man's insignificance. He couldn't describe the discrepancy, and simply questioned, "What is man?" God also named the firmament "heaven", perhaps due to its role of impressing man into a state of awe for its Creator.

### Land and Seas

In addition to the passing of time to which man is alerted by the relentless transition of his days into nights, the ideas of confinement and subjugation also present themselves.

Man's domain is limited to Earth, not heaven. Even on Earth, man is somewhat confined to dry land versus the sea. And on dry land, night confines man. Perhaps this is so significant, that to these phenomena alone God gave names. In other words, with these names "day," "night," "heavens", "land" and "sea," God highlighted Earth's purpose—man—who should subjugate himself to God. Man is confined to his quarters on Earth, not in the heavens, only on land and not at sea, and his actions too are confined to day and not night, a psychologically different realm of time when man's ambitions are constrained.

Man is restricted: geographically, heaven and sea confine him. He can't halt time—day and night are relentless. God created time; it plays a central role in perfecting man. Time is fleeting. Time is limited. Ultimately, youth transforms into old age...life ends with death. God's earthly phenomena are designed to steer man towards reality. "God created heaven and Earth" describes divinely-set boundaries. Man must choose what is the most precious use of his passing time.

"IN THE BEGINNING, GOD CREATED THE HEAVEN AND THE EARTH."

This can be read as follows:

"IN THE BEGINNING, GOD CONFINED MAN SO HE MIGHT RECOGNIZE WHO IMPOSED THAT CONFINEMENT."

God gave names—day, night, heavens, land and seas—to highlight the imposed passing of time and geographical boundaries, the duration and location of human existence. These phenomena focus man on a world he can't control but that controls him and forces his realization of the world's Creator. The Rabbis recognized the significance of God commencing His Torah with these phenomena, that they formulated our prayers to again reiterate these lessons:

*Blessed are you God, King of the world, forming light and creating darkness...*

*Blessed are you God, King of the world, with His word He sunsets the evenings...with understanding He changes times, and exchanges the moments...creating day and night, You expire day and bring night, and divide between day and night...*

Time. Day. Night. Heavens. Land. Seas. Matters so basic and overlooked that we take for granted, created intentionally to focus us on the purpose of Creation, and our purpose in life. ■





PARSHA

# Rebellion

Rabbi Reuven Mann

**T**his week's Parsha, Korach, takes up one of the most tragic stories in the Torah, the rebellion against Moshe's leadership. It is ironic that the instigator of this insurgency was one of Moshe's close relatives, who should have known better.

One wonders, did the Jews not recognize and appreciate the superior qualities of the one who confronted Pharaoh, brought plagues on Egypt, and led the people out of their enslavement? He alone went to the peak of Mount Sinai, where Hashem addressed him directly in the sight of the nation and gave him the Luchot (Tablets).

It should have been apparent to the entire people that Moshe was in a class by himself. Yet that clearly was not the case. According to Nachmanides, Korach's anger was aroused when Moshe appointed Aaron and his descendants to minister in the Temple instead of the bechorot (firstborn males).

Korach realized that he would have no chance if he acted immediately, because Moshe enjoyed great popularity at that point. So, he shrewdly waited for the time when Moshe's approval would plummet, and he would become vulnerable to attack.

That opportunity came after the debacle of the spies, for contrary to the case of the Golden Calf, Moshe did not pray for the people, nor did he rescue them from the decree that they would die in the Wilderness. Korach sensed that Moshe's overall support had weakened, and he struck.

How is it that the people didn't react with outrage to Korach's charges? Where was the hakarat hatov (gratitude) for all the good that Moshe had done for them? Could they point to one situation where Moshe had acted for personal motives and had disregarded the best interests of the nation?

The assertion that the people were upset with Moshe because of the harsh punishment for the sin of the spies is instructive. This indicates that they had not done genuine teshuva (repentance). For that requires that a person look within and take full responsibility for his sinful actions. Had they taken that approach they would never have blamed Moshe for their failure.

Korach accused Moshe of seeking personal aggrandizement by assuming the kingship for



himself and appointing his brother to the highest spiritual position in Israel. One must admit that, from a superficial perspective, Aaron's appointment can seem to be suspicious. Judges and others in positions of authority are expected to avoid not just actual impropriety, but the very appearance of corruption as well. Why then was Aaron's appointment made in a manner that could be interpreted as having selfish motivation?

Let us consider Moshe's prayer to Hashem not to accept the offering of Datan and Aviram. Moshe said, "...I did not take a single donkey from them, nor did I harm any one of them." Rashi comments that, even when he returned to Egypt to assume the leadership and had a right to use a communal donkey, still he used his own transportation.

Why didn't Moshe make use of public funds which would have been perfectly legitimate since he was engaged in community business? Additionally, how does his behavior before he began his mission reflect on actions he took after he was already in a position of power?

In my opinion, Moshe was explaining that being the leader was not something he had pursued or desired. He had accepted the mission purely as a service to Hashem, for which he did not expect any restitution from the people he was serving. Many leaders claim that are "serving" the people, while, in truth, the matter is reversed; they view the people as a means to their own enrichment and glory.

Korach did not really comprehend the uniqueness and greatness of Moshe. Korach projected

onto Moshe the qualities of an ordinary leader, who always seeks to increase power. This misconception caused him to interpret the designation of Aaron as an act of nepotism.

Indeed, Aaron's selection constituted a test for Klal Yisrael, as well. It challenged them to look deeply into the matter and put aside appearances in favor of a sober estimation of Moshe's character. Had they done so, they would have realized that Moshe was the true eved Hashem (servant of G-d), who carried out His instructions faithfully without any concern for personal gain.

Hashem provided the Jews with the greatest leader in all of history. Indeed, we have been blessed with great Torah leaders of absolutely selfless dedication throughout the generations. Have we, as Jews, perceived and properly acknowledged the righteousness of our superlative but humble leaders?

This is a subject of great importance. Let us pay special attention to the prayer we utter in the Amidah regarding this matter: "Bring back our judges as at first and our advisers as in the beginning and remove from us worry and anxiety, and rule over us, You Hashem, alone, with mercy and compassion and exonerate us in judgment. Blessed are you, Hashem, Who loves righteousness and justice."

May we strive to become worthy of our great Torah leaders so that we can learn from their wisdom noble actions. And may we merit to see the day when the rule of Hashem is, once again, upon us.

Shabbat Shalom ■

**P.S.** Have you finished reading the essays in *Eternally Yours: Genesis* and are feeling a bit sad that you no longer have thought-provoking material to look forward to reading on Shabbat?

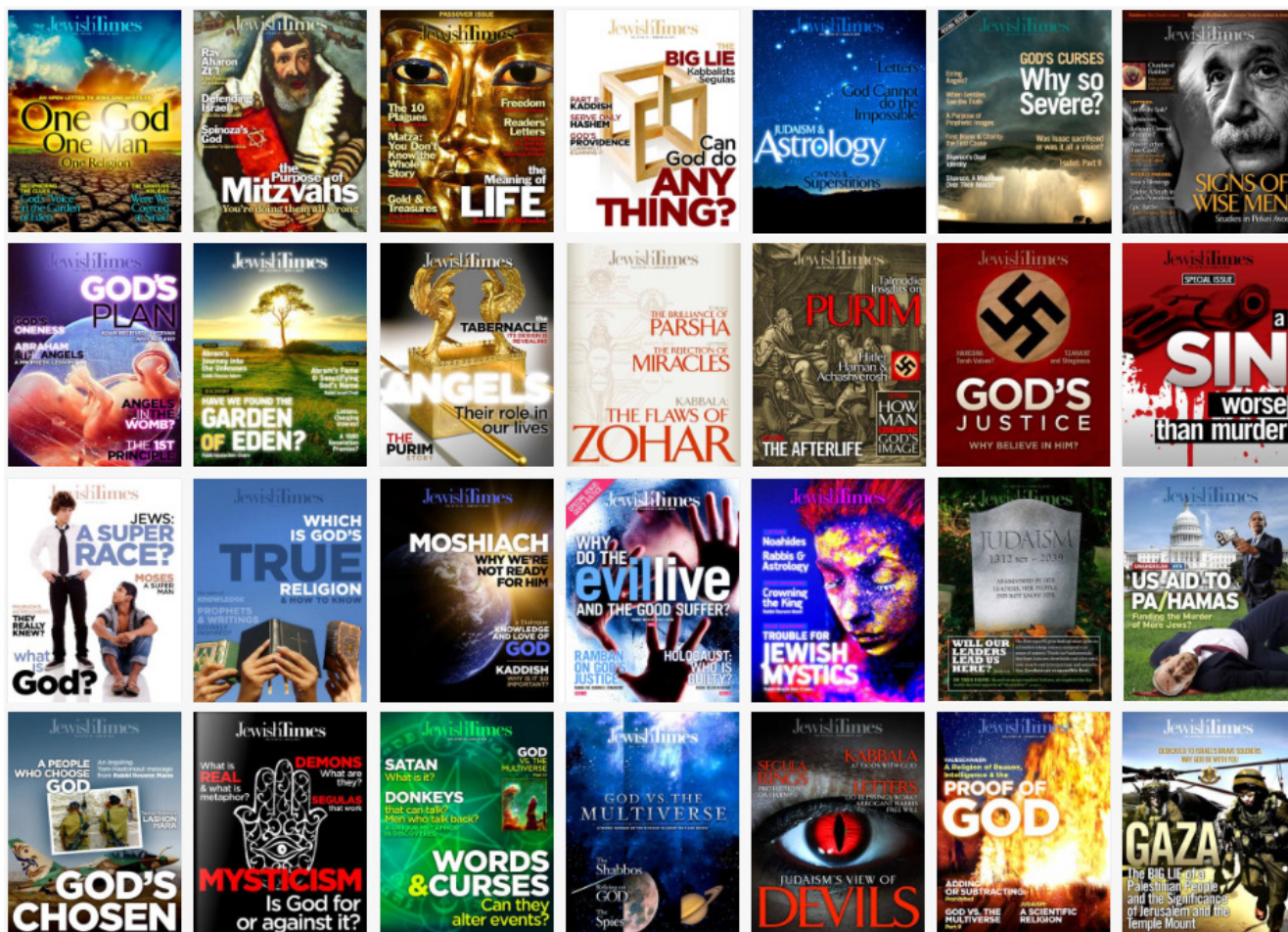
Good news, because *Eternally Yours: Exodus* is now available. The articles offer a new and original perspective on the weekly parsha that will encourage you to think and enhance your appreciation of Torah and enjoyment of Shabbat.

Titles include "No Good Deed Goes Unpunished," "Reclaiming One's Dignity," "Love Is Not All You Need," "Saw You At Sinai," "The True Test of Piety," "Betrayal," and many more. The book on Exodus can be obtained at <http://bit.ly/EY-Exodus>, and the book on Genesis is available at <http://bit.ly/EY-Genesis>.

Additionally we are assiduously at work preparing the next volume in the *Eternally Yours* series, *Bamidbar* and hope to have it ready soon.

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**Rabbi:** Lance, thank you for raising this important question. As you are questioning Maimonides' formulation, the answer will lie in his words:

## Principle I. To know the existence of the Creator

To believe in the existence of the Creator, and this Creator is perfect in all manner of existence. He is the cause of all existence. He causes them to exist and they exist only because of Him. And if you could contemplate a case, such that He was not to exist... then all things would cease to exist and there would remain nothing. And if you were to contemplate a case, such that all things would cease to exist aside from the Creator, His existence would not cease. And He would lose nothing; and oneness and kingship is His alone. Hashem of strength is His name because He is sufficient with His own existence, and sufficient [is] just Him alone, and needs no other. And the existences of the angels, and the celestial bodies, and all that is in them and that which is below them... all need Him for their existence. And this is the first pillar and is attested to by the verse, "I am Hashem your God."

We see, neither suggestion "God exists" or "God is the Creator" accurately represents Maimonides' precise formulation. For there is much more Maimonides includes in his words...

### 1) We must first "believe in the existence of the Creator"

That is, we must first realize:

A) the universe in fact owes its existence to an ultimate "Cause."

B) This further means this cause is a single cause.

C) Additionally, we must not subscribe to the alternate view of an eternal universe.

### 2) "The Creator is perfect in all manner of existence"

What does this mean? This means we must recognize that as the Creator, God has a certain "type" of existence. When the term "existence" is applied to both the universe and God, typically, one understands the existence of both as equal. Maimonides second point is to distinguish between God's existence, and the existence of all other things. All other things exist only accidentally. Meaning, of their own 'nature' (which too is not due to their own doing) all else has "dependent" existence. All else but God, was 'given' existence, and at one point in history, did not exist. This means that the universe's existence is not mandatory or absolute: it cannot exist on its own...it requires God's will to exist. In contrast, God's existence is not dependent. His very nature is to exist, whereas all created things by definition do not have existence as part of their nature.

### 3) Due to this distinguishing quality, Maimonides states "and oneness and kingship is His"

But can there be a king without subjects? This means that man — the only intelligent creature — must view God as king. The knowl-

edge of God's unique nature to (eternally) exist, and that He is the Creator (2 complementary truths) must generate in man a respect for God, as the king.

### 4) "Hashem of strength is His name"

Here, Maimonides says God has a name. A "name" by definition, is that which distinguishes one being from another. When applied to God, Maimonides means to teach that God's uniqueness is "known," it is famous. As in, "he made a name for himself." Maimonides teaches an idea similar to that of Rav Hai Gaon, who said the first of the Ten Commandments — "I am God" — is in fact not a command. Rav Hai Gaon said that God's existence is so apparent, it would belittle the honor due to God, had there been a 'command' to know Him. God intentionally designed the universe precisely to reflect His existence and wisdom, so that mankind would stand in awe of God and all His marvels, and enjoy a life pursuing sciences, truths, and morality, to better understand the Creator. Thus, the overwhelmingly apparent wisdom reflected in the universe makes God's existence undeniable. A command to know God would thereby belittle the obvious nature of His existence.

### 5) "because He is sufficient with His own existence"

We must not assume creation was made due to anything lacking in God, as if He has a motive, or a need, or loneliness. For motive, need and loneliness are all human traits. And, as God created humans, He is not governed by human traits.

### 6) "And the existences of the angels, and the celestial bodies, and all that is in them and that which is below them... all need Him for their existence"

Finally, Maimonides teaches that although the earthly creations may not be on par with God's existence, man might falsely equate higher beings' existences to God's existence. Therefore, Maimonides dispels this fallacy as his final lesson of his First Principle.

So, what is Maimonides' First Principle? It is this:

To realize the Creator.

To know He is one.

To reject the eternity of the universe.

To distinguish His existence from all else, knowing that He exist by His very nature, and all else has dependent existence.

That honor is due to God.

That His existence is obvious.

Not to project human motive onto God for creating the universe.

That He is elevated over all else, including the heavens and angels.

Thank you for your question, as you have enabled me to better understand this principle. ■



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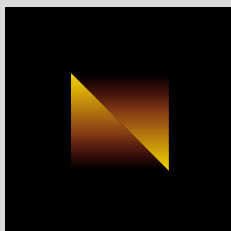
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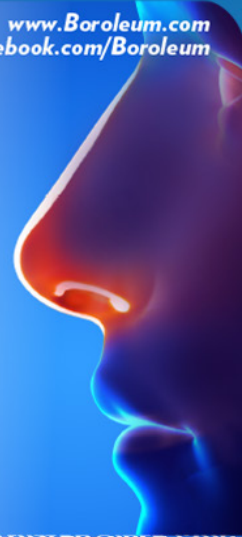
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## PARSHA

# The Holy Censers

Rabbi Dr. Darrell Ginsberg



**T**he tragic rebellion led by Korach and his followers dominates the weekly Torah portion, their actions culminating with the horrific deaths of the participants. While Korach was swallowed by the ground, those who brought the fire pans of incense were consumed by flame. After those who brought the censers were killed, the Torah records the following commandment (Bamidbar 17:1-2):

“The Lord spoke to Moses saying: Say to Eleazar the son of Aaron the kohen that he should pick up the censers from the burned area (but throw the fire away), because they have become sanctified (ki kadeshu)”

What stands out from this command is the standing given to these censers. Why would they be considered sanctified? Those bringing the incense were challenging the system of Torah law as given from God, the supremacy of Moshe’s leadership, and the exclusive position of the kohanim. It would be reasonable to assume that the fire pans used should have been destroyed, considered to be the result of a colossal ideological distortion.

Rashi offers the simplest explanation. He writes that the censers were “forbidden from benefit (hanaa)”. Why? Through being used in the method of Tabernacle service, they acquired the status of being sanctified.

Ramban contests this interpretation, as it seems difficult to understand that the censers were deemed as sanctified if the incense being brought was considered “alien”. Furthermore, if a layman brings a sacrifice, the vessels he uses do not become sanctified.

He then attempts to explain Rashi:

“However, it is possible to say that ”because they did so at the command of Moshe, [the vessels] became holy, because they sanctified them for [the sake of] Heaven, since they thought that God would answer them by [sending down] a fire from Heaven and these fire pans would [therefore] be service utensils in the Tent of Meeting forever.”

Ramban is suggesting that since their intentions were a hope of an appropriate response from God, there was a clear rationale

for why the censers sanctified. Why should we care that their “hearts were in the right place”? The motivation for this worship of God was fueled by a terrible distorted viewpoint. Just because they were convinced what they were doing was correct should not register as being of any importance at all.

Ramban offers another interpretation:

“But what is sound in my view is that Scripture is saying: ‘for they offered them before Hashem, so they have become holy [to be] for a sign to the Children of Israel’; this means to say: I have made them holy from the moment they offered them before Me so that they shall be a sign to the Children of Israel.”

This explanation, which is echoed by other commentators such as Abarbanel, indicates that the hallowed status of the fire pans was the desired objective of God. The concept of sanctification in this context was the role of the censers as being a “sign”. This refers to these fire pans being hammered out and added to the overlay of the altar. Thus, they would be a part of Temple service forever.

While this explanation avoids the problem with the censers acquiring the designation of being sanctified, it deviates from the simple understanding of “ki kadeshu”. What idea is Ramban bringing forth here?

The crux of the debate may rest on how to view this act of worship by the followers of Korach. Moshe understood that the challenge to the position of the kohanim was of the utmost seriousness. Those rebelling saw the exclusivity of service to God as being unjust; equality of Tabernacle access was the driving theme of their attitude. Engaging in the act of bringing incense would, in their minds, bring an agreement from the Divine and proof of their position. Their deaths demonstrated that their path was the wrong one. In truth, the fire pans were the product of a failed rebellion and a horrific ideological distortion; destruction of these vessels made perfect sense. Yet if this occurred, the people could point to a mistake in the service itself that led to their deaths. The service was set up to follow the exact,

step-by-step process used by the Kohen. In doing so, it was critical that whatever happened to those bringing the incense would not be the result of an error or misdirection in the service. One possible expression of the service being completed incorrectly would be the destruction of the fire pans used. The Jewish people could then point to the demise of those vessels as proof that the punishment was the result of a problem in the service, and not in the people performing it. The alternative was to give the fire pans the status of being sanctified, no different than any vessel used in the Temple service. In doing so, the people would see that it was purely due to the incorrect ideology of those bringing the incense that they met their downfall. Moshe thus removed any possible attachment of blame to the performance of the service, ensuring the focus was on the individuals themselves.

The other possibility offered by Ramban sees the status of the censers the result of God’s overall plan. As noted above, the challenge to God and Moshe was quite serious. One concern was how to respond to the accusers and the message it would send to the nation as a whole. Another concern was how the Jewish people related to worship of God through the Tabernacle (and future Temple). The rebellion brought forth a host of underlying emotions among the Jewish people, as they identified with the idea of an “unfair” and “unequal” treatment by the system of halacha. There needed to be a fundamental altering of the approach the Jewish people took towards their role in Temple service. Thus, God creates this new, solitary avenue of worship for those rebelling, with the objective solely to demonstrate that the entire approach being taken is incorrect. This was a one-time act of worship by those not qualified. The overall objective of any service in the Tabernacle and Temple was always connected to sanctifying the name of God in some way. The result would be present here as well, by setting aside the fire pans and using them as part of the altar. The important lessons of the rebellion would be consecrated into the very system of worship, a demonstration to all forever the correct approach to serving God.

While of course the acts of Korach and his followers were heinous, there were important and fundamental ideas that helped re-chart the proper course forward for the Jewish people. The tenuous thread connecting the nation to the system of worship was under attack, and the sanctifying of these fire pans played a pivotal role in correcting the flaws that were present. While we may not currently have the Temple, we must be always be aware of the tremendous challenges that are often present when it comes to the worship of God. ■



# THE JEW WHO SAVED THE AMERICAN

## ★ REVOLUTION ★

*Rabbi Menachem Levine*

**H**eroes of the American Revolutionary War such as Benjamin Franklin, John Hancock, George Washington, Thomas Jefferson and Paul Revere are household names, familiar even to schoolchildren. Yet most American Jews have never heard of Haym Salomon, a Jew who was clearly a hero of the American Revolution. Who was Haym Salomon?

Haym Salomon was born in Leszno (Lissa), Poland, in 1740 to a family descended from Spanish and Portuguese Jews who had immigrated to Poland following the Spanish Inquisition and Expulsion. However, the Jewish villages in Poland were also vulnerable and were attacked on occasion by vicious pogroms. When Haym was a young man, one such pogrom threatened Lissa, and he fled to Holland.

As he traveled through Western Europe toward safer havens, Haym acquired knowledge of finance and fluency in several languages, including German. He returned to Poland in 1770, but in the wake of the Polish Partition in 1772, it seems he

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Statue of  
Robert Morris,  
George Washington  
and Haym Salomon  
rests on Wacker Dr.,  
Chicago





became involved in Poland's Nationalist movement and was forced to flee the country again. Salomon traveled to England and from there sailed to New York, which already was a thriving port and the center of commercial and shipping interests in North America.

In New York, Salomon married Rachel, daughter of Moses B. Franks. Rachel Franks was the sister of Colonel Isaac Franks, a Revolutionary officer of distinction, and Mayer Isaac Franks, who was a judge of the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania.

Salomon's knowledge of finance and accounting practices enabled him to find a job as a broker and commission agent for ships plying the Atlantic. As time would soon tell, Salomon's impact would be vast, for he had arrived in America at one of the greatest moments of world history: the American Revolution.

### JOINING THE REVOLUTION

Salomon sympathized with the Patriot cause and joined the New York branch of the Sons of Liberty. For this reason, in September 1776, he was arrested as a spy. The British pardoned him, conditional on his spending 18 months on a British ship as an interpreter for Hessian soldiers, due to his knowledge of Polish, French, German, Russian, Spanish and Italian. Salomon used his position to help prisoners of the British escape and encourage the Hessians to desert the British war effort.

After Salomon was released from custody, he continued to work underground to sway Hessian allegiance. He was jailed a second time in August 1778, as one of several individuals suspected of planning a fire that would destroy the British royal fleet in New York's harbor. He was sent to the infamous prison of Provost, and a death sentence loomed. But Salomon used several gold guineas that he had hidden on his person to bribe a jailer and escaped to freedom.

### FINANCIAL SUCCESS

Salomon left British-occupied New York and settled in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. At the time, the city of Philadelphia was the center of the Independence movement and home to the Continental Congress, the legislative body of the 13 colonies since 1776. Salomon spoke before the Second Continental Congress, offering his services and requesting a position, but he was turned down.

With borrowed funds, he opened an office as a dealer of bills of exchange. His firm was located on Front Street, near the coffeehouse where Colonial Army officers and members of the Continental Congress often gathered, and his business began to flourish. He also became the agent to the French consul and the paymaster for the French forces in North America.

### FINANCING THE LAST YEARS OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTIONARY WAR

By 1781, the Revolutionary cause was in dire financial straits. The colonies were battling against an extremely wealthy enemy: the British Empire. Keeping the American forces supplied with arms, food and other supplies was a daunting task. In 1781, Salomon began working extensively with Robert Morris, the newly appointed Superintendent of Finance for the Thirteen Colonies, to provide financial support to the revolution.

The Congressional Record of March 25, 1975, reads: When Morris was appointed Superintendent of Finance, he turned to Salomon for help in raising the money needed to carry on the war and later to save the emerging nation from financial collapse. Salomon advanced direct loans to the government and also gave generously of his own resources to pay the salaries of government officials and army officers. With frequent entries of "I sent for Haym Salomon," Morris' diary for the years 1781-84 records some 75 transactions between the two men.

Incredibly, records from the period of 1781-84 show that Salomon's fund-raising and personal loans helped provide over \$650,000 (approximately \$18,035,722.16 in 2019 dollars) to George Washington in his war effort! Salomon brokered the sale of a majority of the war aid from France and the Dutch Republic, selling bills of exchange to American merchants. Salomon also personally supported various members of the Continental Congress during their stays in Philadelphia, including

James Madison and James Wilson. He requested below-market interest rates and he never asked for repayment.

It was prior to the final Revolutionary War battle at Yorktown that Salomon's financial contribution played a deciding role in America's future.

In August 1781, the Continental Army had trapped Lieutenant General Charles Cornwallis in the Virginian coastal town of Yorktown. George Washington and the main army, as well as Count de Rochambeau with his French army, decided to march from the Hudson Highlands to Yorktown and deliver the final blow to the British. Washington's war chest was completely empty, as was that of Congress. Without food, uniforms and supplies, Washington's troops were close to mutiny. Washington determined that he needed at least \$20,000 to finance the campaign. When Morris told him there were no funds or credit available, Washington gave him a simple but eloquent order: "Send for Haym Salomon."

Salomon raised \$20,000 through the sale of bills of exchange. With that contribution, Washington conducted the Yorktown campaign, which proved to be the final battle of the Revolution.

### PROUD AND OBSERVANT JEW

Salomon was involved in Jewish community affairs, as a member of the Orthodox Congregation Mikveh Israel in Philadelphia, also now known as the "Synagogue of the American Revolution." It was founded in 1740 and is the fourth-oldest synagogue continually in use in the United States. Salomon was a major contributor toward the 1782 construction of the congregation's main building. He also served as the treasurer to the Society for the Relief of Destitute Strangers, the first Jewish charitable organization in Philadelphia.

Salomon was among the prominent Jews involved in the successful effort to have the Pennsylvania Council of Censors remove the religious test oath required for office-holding under the State Constitution.

In 1784, Salomon answered anti-Semitic slander in the press by stating: "I am a Jew; it is my own nation; I do not despair that we shall obtain every other privilege that we aspire to enjoy along with our fellow citizens."

### AN UNTIMELY DEATH

Sadly, Salomon contracted tuberculosis and passed away suddenly on January 8, 1785, at the age of 45. Due to the failure of the government and his private lenders to repay debt incurred by the war, he was impoverished and his family was left penniless after his passing.

His obituary in the Independent Gazetteer read: Thursday, last, expired, after a lingering illness, Mr. Haym Salomon, an eminent broker of this city, was a native of Poland, and of the Hebrew nation. He was remarkable for his skill and integrity in his profession, and for his generous and humane deportment. His remains were yesterday deposited in the burial ground of the synagogue of this city.

### NEGLECTED BY A YOUNG AMERICA

When Salomon passed away, he was a bankrupt man with a wife, three children under the age of 7, and a fourth on the way. His estate was valued at \$44,000 but had liabilities of \$45,000. Not long after his death, his chief clerk, who could have been crucial in straightening out financial matters regarding the family debt, committed suicide. Attempts were made by his heirs over the next few years to obtain some retribution, but a series of suspect occurrences thwarted these challenges. It was alleged by the government, for instance, that papers concerning the Salomon estate claims were destroyed when government buildings in the District of Columbia were burned by the British in the War of 1812.

Salomon's fourth child, Haym, Jr., met with President John Tyler in the early 1840s and reportedly left a sheaf of documents with him for his perusal. The box of papers later disappeared. The younger Salomon then petitioned the Senate Committee on Revolutionary Claims until 1864, when he was in his late 70s. He even offered to settle the claim at a sum of just \$100,000. This was quite generous considering that, with interest, the actual amount owed would have spiraled to a debt of grand proportions. At this, the Committee once more approved the

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claim's legitimacy and submitted it to Congress, but Congress again failed to approve the expenditure.

In the 1870s, it was discovered that a cache of Salomon papers remaining in Congressional archives were missing. Many of them concerned financial dealings and bore the signatures of Washington, Jefferson and other historic figures. It is assumed that they were pilfered for the value of these autographs.

In 1893, Salomon's heirs petitioned Congress to strike a commemorative medal in honor of their patriotic forebear, with a Congressional appropriation submitted in the amount of \$250, but this was also rejected. Future president Woodrow Wilson sat on a committee charged with the task of founding a university in Salomon's honor in 1911, but the project was derailed by World War I.

It was only 150 years after his passing that Haym Salomon finally began to be recognized for his noble deeds to the young nation. In 1939, Warner Brothers released *Sons of Liberty*, a short film about Salomon. In 1941, writer Howard Fast wrote *Haym Salomon, Son of Liberty*. During World War II, the United States liberty ship SS Haym Salomon was named in his honor.

In 1941, a statue was dedicated in downtown Chicago, depicting George Washington standing between and clasping the hands of Robert Morris and Haym Salomon, publicly recognizing the two men whose services were so vital in financing the Revolutionary War.

In 1946, a memorial statue was erected to honor Salomon at Hollenbeck Park in Los Angeles. The statue was rededicated in 2008 at Pan-Pacific Park in the Fairfax District, where it can be found on the corner of Gardner and Third Streets.

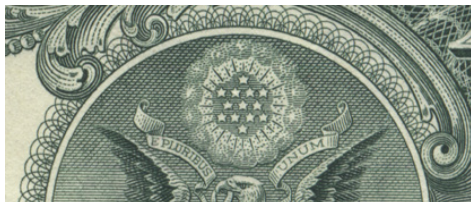
In 1975, the United States Postal Service issued a commemorative stamp honoring Haym Salomon for his contributions to the cause of the American Revolution. This stamp, like others in the "Contributors to the Cause" series, was printed on the front and the back. On the glue side of the stamp, the following words were printed in pale green ink: "Financial Hero - Businessman and broker Haym Salomon was responsible for raising most of the money needed to finance the American Revolution and later to save the new nation from collapse."

In 1975, Shirley Milgrim wrote *Haym Salomon, Liberty's Son*. In addition, there are fraternal orders, streets, historical markers, cemeteries and even a nursing home named in his honor.

### THE LEGEND OF THE DOLLAR BILL

The First Continental Congress requested that Benjamin Franklin and a group of men come up with a seal. It took them four years to accomplish this task and another two years to get it approved.

On the back of the one-dollar bill there are two circles. Together, they comprise the Great Seal of the United States. When one looks carefully at the arrangement of the 13 stars in the righthand circle, it can be seen that they are arranged as a Magen David.



The Numismatic Bibliomania Society recounts one version of how the Jewish symbol came to be found on the dollar note. "This was ordered by George Washington, when he asked Haym Solomon, a wealthy Philadelphia Jew, what he would like as a personal reward for his services to the Continental Army. Solomon said he wanted nothing for himself, but he would like something for his people," the story claims. "The Star of David was the result."

Most historians view that version as apocryphal: Washington had no input into the design of the Great Seal, and the original design specification for the Great Seal included no instructions about how the constellation of 13 stars on the obverse side should be arranged. The likely reason why artist Robert Scot chose to arrange that constellation of 13 stars into the shape of a hexagram when engraving the first die of the Great Seal in 1782 is unknown, but most assume it is because he was

emulating the arrangement of stars on the first American flag.

Nineteenth-century historian John L. Motley remarked, "Deeds, not stones, are the true monuments of the great." With his contributions and actions, Haym Salomon helped lay the foundation for the independence of the United States of America. Until today, we are all the beneficiaries of Haym Salomon's deeds and legacy.

### KHAL KADOSH-CONGREGATION MIKVEH ISRAEL

Among the oldest Jewish congregations in the United States, Khal Kadosh-Congregation Mikveh Israel was founded in 1740 when a group of Jews began gathering for minyanim in private homes. The congregation acquired a sefer Torah in 1761 and dedicated their first building on June 19, 1782. Incredibly, Benjamin Franklin was an early contributor to the shul's building fund! The shul's building today is at 44 North 4th Street, between Arch and Market Streets, and was dedicated on July 4, 1976 — the American Bicentennial.

A number of the early founding members of Mikveh Israel in Philadelphia were from prominent Sephardic families in New York, Charleston, Richmond and Savannah, and though there was also a significant number of Ashkenazic Jews, there was broad agreement to adopt the Spanish and Portuguese customs that were then observed by most American Jews. The shul continues to follow this nusach until today.

Mikveh Israel is called "the Synagogue of the Revolution" because the early founding members of the congregation were very active in the activities that led up to the war, with many of them signing the Non-Importation Act of 1765. Its members were active in the war effort itself, either directly fighting on the American side, supplying the army with food, ammunition, equipment and clothing, or contributing funds that made war possible and ensured an American victory.

Nathan Levy, an early member of the congregation (1704-1753), was a merchant and owner of ships registered at the port of Philadelphia. He secured the first grant of land for a Jewish cemetery in Pennsylvania.

Isaac Moses (1742-1818) was a merchant who subscribed 3,000 pounds and his personal credit to provide provisions for the Colonial Army.

Rebecca Gratz (1781-1869) was a founder of many social and educational institutions that served as models for others, both Jewish and non-Jewish. She founded educational and charitable institutions devoted to the needs of Jewish and gentile women and children. She was well known even to non-Jews.

Jonas and Rebecca Machado Phillips (1746-1831) were active participants in Philadelphia's communal, educational and philanthropic organizations, and were the parents of 21 children. Their descendants were political leaders in the United States.

One grandson, Franklin J. Moses, Sr., was elected as chief justice of the state supreme court in 1868. Another grandson was Uriah Phillips Levy, the first Jewish commodore in the United States Navy. In 1834, Uriah bought Monticello eight years after President Thomas Jefferson's death and used his own money to preserve the house and estate for the American people. Franklin J. Moses's son, Franklin J. Moses, Jr., was elected governor of South Carolina in 1872.

The congregation was led from 1829 through 1850 by the famous Chazzan Isaac Leiser. Born in Germany, Leiser arrived in the United States in 1824. He singlehandedly provided American Jews with many of the basic religious texts, including the first English-language translation of Tanach. He also persuaded others to work for the revitalization of Judaism in America. As editor and publisher of *The Occident*, Leiser defended Torah Judaism from any changes in synagogue practice, and he eloquently and forcefully argued for tradition.

Mikveh Israel remains today an active synagogue with weekly and Shabbos services in Center City, Philadelphia. It also hosts visitors who come to see several exhibits and photos and experience over 270 years of American Jewish history. ■

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# LIFE

## THE SOUL'S JOURNEY

RABBI ISRAEL CHAIT

STUDENT'S TRANSCRIPTION OF THE  
PIRKEI AVOS LECTURES (1990)

AVOS 5:21

JUDAH BEN TEMA USED TO SAY: "AT FIVE YEARS OF AGE THE STUDY OF SCRIPTURE; AT TEN THE STUDY OF MISHNAH; AT THIRTEEN TO FULFILL COMMANDMENTS; AT FIFTEEN THE STUDY OF TALMUD; AT EIGHTEEN FOR MARRIAGE; AT TWENTY FOR PURSUIT; AT THIRTY THE PEAK OF STRENGTH; AT FORTY FOR UNDERSTANDING; AT FIFTY TO GIVE COUNSEL; AT SIXTY OLD AGE; AT SEVENTY FULLNESS OF YEARS; AT EIGHTY FOR STAMINA; AT NINETY A BENT BODY; AT ONE HUNDRED, AS GOOD AS DEAD AND GONE COMPLETELY OUT OF THE WORLD."

A child should not be taught before the age of 5. The modern world sends children to school at the age of 2 or 3; they have a fantasy that by doing so the child will be more advanced. But it turns out that it was just a fantasy. Because by the age of 12 or 13, those children ended up no more advanced than others. Judaism does not hold that a child should be forced to study and concentrate before the age of 5. Concentration is not natural for a child and it does not benefit him; in fact, it harms the child. Rashi says you are not to teach children Torah earlier than 5 because Torah strains the strength of the child.

*Jacob went out from Beer Sheva and went to Haran (Gen. 28:10).*

The Rav asked why both words were needed, that Jacob "left" and also "went." In the previous parsha, Isaac blessed Jacob. But Rebecca was concerned about the danger of Esav. She told Jacob to flee to Haran so

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Esav would not harm him. The Rav said that it is the role of the mother to protect the child; the father's role is to help him progress. There are two different processes in child education. "Going out" was due to the blessings of Abraham. "Going to" was to flee from Esav. Jacob fulfilled the command of honoring his father and his mother.

The biggest problem in child education is that the parents' egos are always involved. The parents want to advance the child as this provides greater pride for the parent. Parents invest much fantasy in their child, which is dangerous and harmful for the child and it always backfires. But people do not learn from others' mistakes.

Before the ages of 5 to 7, a child should remain in his natural environment with his mother and develop naturally. The uniformity system where all children start school at age 5 is a problem and this hurts the child as some children are not yet ready. Each child must be evaluated individually. Chazal's idea was to follow each individual child's nature: "Teach a child according to his nature..." (Prov. 22:6). A child that develops at a slower rate is unrelated to intelligence. Development progresses in psychological stages. A child can be very intelligent but grow out of his developmental stages slower than others. To force such a child to learn sooner than he is ready can cause great psychological damage where any gain is forfeited.

Mishnah is to first be taught at the age of 10. This comprises the Oral Torah and is more difficult than scripture (chumash). And gemara study does not start until age 15 as it is analysis, and one's mind is not capable of this activity until more developed, at approximately age 15 when one is capable of theoretical knowledge. I was taught gemara at age 9 and I didn't understand it. It made no sense to me. I remember trying to grasp it. I was forced to memorize it as it was a praiseworthy matter to memorize the amud (page). I thought it was a good idea so I did it, but I gained nothing, and it was actually a harmful process because my mind could not grasp any ideas. I was taking something that was supposed to be ideas and trying to grapple with it, to place it in some compartment in my mind which I really could not find. The whole study was alien to me; it was a waste of time and harmful. But mishnah—the facts of the Oral Torah—a person can handle at age 10. At that age, one is not ready to juggle big theories, but one can commence on material that lends itself to further theoretics, but without going into them. That is a proper approach and how a child should be taught.

Something in learning that frustrates a person is bad for him. To force a person to grasp what he is yet not ready for is harmful. It causes strain and makes the learning something alien. One rabbi says that from ages 5 to 10 it is proper to study chumash, meaning that one should not start before age 5 or continue past age 10. It does not mean to stop totally, but that the emphasis should now shift from chumash to mishnah. In gemara Berachos Rashi says to minimize the study of Tanach because it draws the emotions. Historically this is absolutely correct; all the movements that denied the Oral Torah loved studying Tanach. These movements were enamored by the areas of the prophets which draw the emotions, especially the eschatological areas: areas dealing with the end of time. The prophets discuss this area with great beauty. But in Judaism, there must be a balance. The catastrophe of the people emotionally drawn to this area was their abandonment of reason and rationality. In the second Temple, all the sects—the Essenes and others—went off the track and denied Torah's wisdom. That is what Rashi said, "Do not teach too much Tanach." Transitioning to the study of mishnah at age 10 and to gemara at age 15 shows the child Torah's wisdom and he won't be drawn by the emotions. This almost parallels the principle to divide one's daily study into thirds:

*Rabbi Tanchum bar Hanilai says, "A person should always divide his years into thirds as follows: One third for chumash, one third for mishnah and one third for talmud" (Avodah Zara 19b).*

This of course speaks of a mature person. But there is a dispute on this halacha, as the gemara continues:

*Does a person know the length of his life, [that he can calculate how much a third will be? The Gemara answers:] When we said that a one should divide his time into thirds, the intention was with regard to his days, i.e., he should devote one third of each day to chumash, mishnah and talmud, respectively.*

Maimonides says that of the 9 hours of each day [available to a person outside of his obligations and sleep] he should learn scripture for 3 hours, mishnah for 3 hours and gemara for 3 hours (Hil. Talmud Torah 1:11,12):

*If one was a craftsman and engaged himself three hours daily to his work and to Torah nine hours, of those nine hours he should devote three hours to the study of Written Torah, and three hours to Oral Torah and the last three hours to mental reasoning, to deduct one matter from another. (Ibid. 1:12)*

But this is only when one first commences learning. As one advances, one should spend all 9 hours in gemara. Gemara refers to theoretical analysis. Maimonides says that one should occasionally return to scripture and mishnah to ensure that he does not forget either: all in accordance with the person's theoretical capabilities.

Rabbeinu Tam asks why this three-part division is no longer followed. He says it is because we learn Talmud Bavli which contains all three. "Bavli" means mixed together. Rabbeinu Tam did not give the same answer as Maimonides. Rabbeinu Tam held that the halacha of dividing one's learning into these three areas is a halacha in derech halimud, the manner of study, and applies even when one becomes advanced. He held that the prescription for Torah study is to always be involved in these three subjects. According to Maimonides, the study of scripture and mishnah are [only] preparations for theoretics; the latter being the essence. He held that scripture and mishnah are only to provide one with the facts. Attaining perfection is through theoretical knowledge. But Rabbeinu Tam held that there is an intrinsic gain in learning all three subjects daily; one can never abandon studying scripture and mishnah. When learning Talmud Bavli and encountering a verse from scripture, one should study the chapter and know that verse.

Today, yeshivas focus on gemara and not scripture and mishnah. This is because once a talmid leaves yeshiva at the age 20, or 25 if he is lucky, he won't be able to become a lamdan [talmudic scholar] later on [and therefore he must focus solely on gemara while attending yeshiva]. People work far greater than three hours today [leaving less time to study gemara] so the yeshiva must focus on gemara. Furthermore, the need for fluency in scripture and mishnah today is unlike earlier years when Tanach was written on a klaf [scrolls] and not everyone had one, requiring Tanach to be memorized. The gemara says that they couldn't even afford a klaf for a shul. But today, all the [scriptural and mishnaic] sources are available in print. Therefore, the yeshivas are justified in abandoning the focus on scripture and

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mishnah since the goal is to create a lamdan. If during a talmid's time in yeshiva he divides his study into these three parts, we will not produce talmidei chochamim.

Another reason to focus on gemara is because it's focus is ideas, which students like. But to focus on language and how to make a laining is not attractive to teenagers, and once they leave yeshiva they will not continue learning because they did not come to enjoy it.

### AT THIRTEEN TO FULFILL COMMANDMENTS

A change occurs at this age. It is the time of life when a person has the ability to exercise his rational control over his instinctual nature. I often tell people not to tell a child "Control yourself." It is a mistake. Parents tell children, "Don't do X because it is not good." They try to explain to the child why X not good. However, the child does not yet have that compartment of his mind. The child does not have the will to exercise control. This harms a child because his inability to exert self-control results in guilt. Teaching control by beating the child is also not right. As this does not teach control, rather, it teaches the child to fear the parent.

It is not necessary to teach a child to exert rational control; this comes naturally. The same is true regarding socializing. Placing children in school at age 2 to teach them how to socialize is wrong, as socializing too is a natural phenomenon [it is not a learned behavior, but it is as natural to socialize as it is to laugh at humor; the latter too does not need to be taught].

Children must not perform harmful actions. The only way to prevent them is by force: simply take the child away [from whatever harmful activity he is engaging in]. There's nothing wrong with a child experiencing frustration. In fact, it is healthy because not frustrating a child and instead, catering to his every need, the child will not be prepared for life. This is because one does not fulfill every wish in his life. Parents don't like frustrating a child because the child cries and the parent thinks that if they cried, it would be painful [the situation causing the parent's cry must be bad]. But parents fail to realize that the child's cry is unlike the cry of an adult. The child cries as he wishes for everything. While the parent's wishes are tempered by their knowledge of reality [a person cannot get everything he desires], which cancels out many wishes, so parents curb their desires. [Therefore, when a parent does cry, it must be due to a real trouble. The parent then projects that severity onto a child's cry, feeling bad for the child, when in

fact, like the adult has properly learned, every wish cannot be realized. The child learning this lesson through frustration is good for him. Thus, the parent should not view the child's cry as something bad.]

There are people who can't tolerate protracted satisfaction, where the benefits or results of their labors are not immediate, but very far off. Some people can't go to medical school because it takes 5 to 10 years. They are accustomed to immediate gratification. Thus, the denial of immediate gratification benefits a child. Frustration within reason is good. Everyone including children must enjoy life. The mistake is to identify with a child and view him as a "little man," which he is not. You must use reason when raising a child and not identification.

The reason adults can't exercise control later in life is not because they weren't taught. It is precisely because they were taught to do something which they we're not ready to do. Thereby, they developed hatred against it and no longer wish to associate with that matter. Therefore, they refuse to exercise control. The natural process [of developing an affinity towards something] that would have taken place, has been thwarted. That is why a mistake in this area is a dangerous mistake.

When frustrating a child, it is okay to explain to him why you are not giving him what he wants. You do not have to make the child think that you are being mean. But you cannot expect the force of that reason to control a child, when he lacks the compartments of the mind that is capable of doing such a thing [grasping the reason and exerting control].

People who are least prepared for life are those to whom others constantly catered. They suffer all their lives because they can't exercise control. Adoniyahu ben Chagis—King Solomon's brother—was arrogant and politically foolish. This was for a reason, as the verse says:

*His father had never scolded him saying, "Why did you do that?" He was also very exceedingly handsome and was born after Absalom (I Kings 1:6).*

King David never made Adoniyahu depressed or accountable. He never reprimanded him; King David overlooked anything he did. Apparently, depression [through reprimanding] is a good thing. After the age of 12, a parent is prohibited from exerting physical control over his child, but psychological control is permitted.

It is important for a child to develop a close relationship with his mother when the child is

young. But that does not mean that there is no control over the child. They say regarding the most brilliant people that they remained close within their mothers until age 6 with no schooling until that age. But the mother does not cater to every want of the child. There can exist a close relationship without spoiling the child; the two are not mutually exclusive. If controlling and frustrating the child is not done out of anger, but rationally, the child knows it and the positive relationship is never broken or minimized. The key is that the relationship with the child must be managed with wisdom. It is difficult to control one's emotions. Aristotle said that raising a family is like being a general: "As a general of an army dispatches his troops logically, one must dispatch his emotions logically." He was correct.

At age 13 one engages in mitzvos for then one is accountable. At that age, one possesses the psychological ability to exert rationality and control [and can choose to follow the mitzvos].

### TWENTY FOR PURSUIT

Pursuit (ridifah) typically refers to running. The commentators say this refers to war:

*Five of you shall give chase to a hundred, and a hundred of you shall give chase to ten thousand; your enemies shall fall before you by the sword (Lev. 26:8).*

This refers to battle. If that is the case, it is not just a physical phenomenon of running, but it also refers to psychological orientation. Interesting is that one is not culpable for dinei shamayim (heaven-bound judgments) until he is 20 years old, but Bais Din will punish after age 13. This is because the age of 20 marks full maturity: psychologically, physically, physiologically and in all ways. Apparently, although Chazal held maturity to be age 20, in matters of marriage—socially—one is suitable at age 18. In truth, some say that marriage is preferable earlier than 18 because romantic preference exists even earlier. This is predicated on one living within a halachic society where all people follow Torah. But in other societies, one may need to wait longer than age 18 when one is mature enough to better assess the girl. [In societies that do not follow Torah there is the danger that a prospective mate is unfit.] But it is true, if you understand modern psychology, even in a person's teens, one can accurately choose a proper romantic partner. Romantic preference is important, as the gemara says that one cannot marry until he sees his mate; there must be mutual attraction. Without it,

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one cannot fulfill "...and you shall love your friend like yourself" (Lev. 19:18).

Chazal set marriage at 18 years of age due to practical reasons, such as having sufficient time to learn Torah and to get a job. This is sensible and also makes sense psychologically. However, today's society presents a danger because one can be in love with the most harmful individual. In a halachic society rational parents guide the child to find a mate with proper character and livelihood. Then all that remains is romantic preference and the child could select that on his or her own. But in our society there are many more decisions to be made, such as the partner's values, which, at an early age, one is not ready to judge accurately. Chazal's selection of age 18 was in a specific situation [not pertaining to today's society].

### AT THIRTY THE PEAK OF STRENGTH

Some explain this physically; peak physical strength is at age 30. At age 20—maturity—a person naturally embarks upon some form of conquest: "pursuit," or battle. But battle doesn't necessitate being in the army. It means that at age 20 one forms in his mind the conquest of his life: what he is going to accomplish in his lifetime. A teenager doesn't want to be bothered with this; he is happy wasting time. This is also true intellectually, as they say that Nobel Prize winners enjoy most of their greatest breakthroughs in thought in their 20s. Newton made his breakthroughs at age 20; Einstein too was in his early 20s [when he made his breakthroughs]. At this age a person is mature and at the height of his powers. Rav Chaim too made his breakthroughs at an early age. Of course, the person keeps going and his Torah grows on. But that's different than making an initial breakthrough.

Strength refers to after the ground is broken, in one's 20s, and one proceeds strongly in his 30s along his previously chartered path. After that period in his 30s one won't ever again have that strength. Carrying the Mishkan (Tabernacle) demonstrated the ideas of life. The priests started carrying it at age 30 to convey this idea.

People like to feel they have time. Therefore, Chazal informed us of these stages so one does not pass up these valuable one-time chances to harness various levels of development and their accompanying benefits.

### FORTY FOR UNDERSTANDING

Animals partake of maturity and nothing more. But man has the ability to perfect

himself. As Maimonides says, "Just as no one is born a carpenter, no one is born perfected." Man is subject to a "process" of perfection. There are two components: maturity and the process; the latter acts on the organism and perfects it. Age 20 speaks in the framework of natural maturity, in which all living creatures partake. But in man, maturity is only a potential which must be developed and realized. What acts on the potential is how one lives. Assuming that one lives a life of wisdom during his 30s, after he places all his energy into this wisdom, he reaches his potential. After this point he will not realize any great qualitative breakthroughs. That's what is meant by "40 for understanding." Understanding means that at age 20 his potential is completed, and his realization of his potential is at 40. One's prime is age 40.

Someone might feel sad to reach one's prime at 40. But it is just the opposite. The reason that scientific breakthroughs are made when a person is young is because science is a specific type of subject: succeeding generations build on previous ones and uncover new areas. Genius is required to identify a new area: a new qualitative opening. Science progresses through such openings: qualitative leaps. And since at age 20 one's potential is realized, and he is now engaged in pursuit—mapping out one's life's plan—now is when one will act optimally to make breakthroughs. The brilliant mind will spot the opening. If he does not spot the opening at age 20, he will not do so at age 40. In Science, after age 20, one is spent: you need another individual to come and spot the next opening. In Torah too, like Rav Chaim who saw a new approach when he was young, that's like a scientific breakthrough. Everyone is attracted to the glory of the breakthrough. But ego aside, the benefit of the breakthrough is that the person is a chocham. He lives as a chocham and has the penetrating knowledge and he continues to uncover ideas and gains knowledge throughout his life. That is the real benefit. Man's greatness is to have this knowledge and to live with it and to continue to uncover ideas. This is reached at age 40. Now, wherever he turns, he perceives matters with depth. That is man's benefit, not the glory of the breakthrough and the accompanying sensationalism.

Therefore, it is a happy matter to be 40 and have understanding. The important thing is benefiting from realizing your potential. The wisdom that benefits man's life is the wisdom that he develops at age 40 when his potential is realized, and he can apply it and continue to gain knowledge in every area. That is the best time in life, it [his wisdom and intelligent approach to life] improves his life, and is what

gives him life in this world and in the afterlife. That's the most important thing.

Understanding is [occurs] when one has sharpened all his tools. Age 20 is the brilliant light of genius to chart one's course in life. Age 40 is when one's abilities have reached their optimal level. But that's not the ability to scan and spot your mark:

*Rabba said, "Conclude from here that a person does not understand the opinion of his teacher until after forty years" (Avoda Zara 5b).*

At age 40 there is an added depth, a quantitative increase that provides a certain qualitative depth. Even those holding that Kabbalah is correct (the Gra learned it), we do not know if what we possess today is the same Kabbalah. But all agree that one should not study it until one is 40 years old; it is prohibited. This is because the person will come up with nonsense. Not only is one required to possess intelligence and the ability to learn, but one requires a depth of understanding.

When I say "understanding" means that one is honed to the finest degree, it is not a perfect analogy [to honing a tool]. This is because honing a tool means that one keeps sharpening it until it reaches a certain [quantitative] point. But in knowledge it is a qualitative point. It's where one reaches a certain depth. Although one is engaged in the same process for 20 years, when he reaches a certain point, there is a qualitative change [unlike sharpening a tool where one only reaches a quantitative point]. When one realizes his potential, it is a different kind of perfection of the mind. And only that kind of person can delve into these areas, otherwise he will come up with absolute nonsense. All these people who are attracted to Kabbalah are attracted due to primitive reasons. And it's the most dangerous thing and they are guaranteed to come up with nonsense because it is nonsense that attracts them to begin with. Chazal recognized one has no right to delve into this area unless he is 40 years old. This does not mean chronologically but intellectually. Wisdom affects the total personality; it is a fundamental of Judaism. I would differentiate here between the mathematician at age 40, and the talmid chocham at age 40. The mathematician's knowledge did not affect him as a person. But in Torah, the more one learns and sharpens his faculties and realizes his potential, this affects the total person. At age 40 he is now a different person, and only then can he study Kabbalah. But before age 40 he will come up with nonsense. Ramah says in a teshuva (responsa) that he was

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criticized for studying philosophy, but he says that more harm came about by studying Kabbalah than by studying philosophy. I believe he said more kefirah [heresy] came from Kabbalah than from philosophy.

#### AT FIFTY TO GIVE COUNSEL

This refers simply to politics. Experiences and a stage in life are necessary to understand political savvy. A certain personality is also needed. This is not just the sharpening of the mind; another quality is required. Experience affects a person as his fantasies have been blunted. In youth, the fantasies are very strong and cause immoderate reactions. In youth, one responds strongly: when offended, one retaliates harshly and immediately. But at age 50, one has lived through experiences and he is settled and in line with reality. He feels that whatever he is, he is. He is not embarking on a new course. Youth and fantasy are over. That is the type of person from whom to seek political advice. Such a person thinks impartially without the sharp emotions tugging. You might say that he is a certain degree removed from life. He is not so excitable. Rechavam rejected the advice of the elders and followed the advice of the young men that he grew up with, who gave him the advice he wanted (I Kings 12:8). Counseling on human affairs requires a stability of mind. Incidentally, this entire progression of our mishnah refers to the perfect situation.

#### AT SIXTY OLD AGE

It is learned from a verse in Job that a person at age 60 is ready to die:

*You will come to the grave in ripe old age as shocks of grain are taken away in their season (Job 5:26).*

“In ripe old age” in Hebrew is בכלח which numerically equals 60. But what changes at the age of 60? Death becomes a reality, changing one’s personality. The fantasy of immortality is over; life is no longer endless. One is removed from what I would call the “clamor of life,” a difficult thing to face. Today, the sentiment is “always be youthful,” which means to always be foolish and not realize what’s going to happen. It means to deny reality. That is the American ideal. In Judaism, we have to adjust to how God created man [we must adjust to our mortality].

A different version of this mishnah says “At

60 for wisdom.” However, we said “At 40 for understanding,” so what is this wisdom referred to here? This is a different kind of wisdom that one gains when he withdraws from the nonsense of this world. His mind is steeped in the world of the absolute. For when a normal person recognizes his mortality, he withdraws and directs his energies towards those matters that are eternal. That is what wisdom means. Not in terms of sharpness or abilities, but where his energies are in the world of wisdom. Einstein wrote in a letter that it is hard to write a biography; a man of 50 is not the same man of 30 [one who writes a biography at age 50 is not writing as the man he was at age 30. Thus, the biographical portion that records his 30s is tainted by his current age of 50 and is inaccurate to that degree]. And a man of 60 years is not the same as he was when he was 50. Einstein was a normal human being and he underwent these changes as Chazal state. He said that when he grew older, he tremendously enjoyed being alone because he would withdraw from the nonsense of the clamor of life and direct his concentration onto the world of ideas and wisdom. As a wise man progresses, he changes. One cannot be 60 at the age of 30. You cannot jump ahead, and you must live life at the stage in which you are at. It is important to know the stages.

#### AT SEVENTY, FULLNESS OF YEARS

*And Abraham died at a good ripe age, old and contented (Gen. 25:8)*

Maimonides said Abraham wasn’t looking for additional life anymore. One comes to a time in his life when, in terms of accomplishments, one looks backward instead of forward. שיבה means that whatever one has done, he has done. It refers to the acceptance of reality regarding accomplishments. But he progresses, “In old age they still produce fruit” (Psalms 92:15). The gemara says that as a talmid chocham ages, he becomes more secure, calmer. Reality fits in line with what he has learned all his life and it makes him a more total person. In that sense it is the best part of his life. But שיבה means there is no more push forward.

#### AT EIGHTY FOR STAMINA

Basically, at 70 years old, one is done. This now deals with something else. But people live

beyond their lifespan. This does not mean physical stamina, but it also includes psychological stamina. This is because at 80 years of age, the difficulties one encounters, he never encountered previously. And that is why this stage in life requires strength, a certain strength of character to be able to cope with the physical difficulties. One needs courage at this part of life and some people can’t do it; they give up. When one gives up psychologically, it affects his body.

#### AT NINETY A BENT BODY

If you see centenarians, they have a fixed glaze, like they’re removed from this world.

Maimonides did not make a single comment on this entire mishnah. Obviously, his edition did not have this mishnah.

This is a beautiful mishnah and you can appreciate it only if you have one idea: the human soul. A person with this idea realizes that in man there is an essence, a metaphysical essence. The soul is brought into this world and it travels through a journey: 5, 15, 20...100 years, and then it exits this world. The mishnah is not a sad mishnah. It is the story the journey of the soul in this physical existence. So, if one has fantasies of unbelievable conquest and endless success, this mishnah will depress him greatly. But if one recognizes what the human soul is and what his eternity is in terms of his soul, and he knows that this world is a journey with a beginning and different stages, and then the soul removes itself and eventually continues in its eternal state, it is not a sad matter that one recognizes this. It is a difficult thing, but that’s what the mishnah is about. And finally, at age 100 there is no purpose in a person’s journey any longer. ■





PARSHA

# The Angel of DEATH

Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim

**I**n Parshas Korach (Numbers, 17:13) Rashi states an amazing story of how Aaron “seized the Angel of Death against its will.” In order to understand this metaphor, we must first understand the events immediately prior.

God killed Korach and his rebellion. On the morrow, the Jewish people said the following (Numbers, 17:6): “You (Moses and Aaron) have killed the people of God,” referring to Korach and his assembly. Evidently, the Jews could not make such a statement the same day as God’s destruction of the Korach assembly, perhaps because the Jews were too frightened at the moment. But as their terror waned, they mustered the courage to speak their true feelings on the next day.

What they said were actually two accusations: 1) Moses and Aaron are murderers, and 2) those who were murdered are God’s people. The Jews made two errors, and God addressed both.

The method God used to correct their second error was to demonstrate through a miracle that Aaron in fact was following God, and Korach and his group were not: detached wood—the staff—miraculously continued its growth and blossomed almonds. Aaron’s rod blossoming demonstrated whom God favored, and to whom He related, even via a miracle. Now the Jew’s false opinion that Korach followed God was corrected, as it was Aaron’s staff which God selected and not Korach’s.

But how did Moses correct the people’s false opinion, that he and Aaron were murderers? How did the incense, which Moses instructed Aaron to bring correct the problem, and stay off the plague, which God sent to kill the Jews? Moses commanded Aaron to take the incense and stand between the living and the dead during the plague, which only temporarily stopped the plague. It was not until Aaron returned back to Moses that God completely

halted the plague. What does Aaron standing there accomplish, that it stopped the plague temporarily? Additionally, what does his return to Moses and God at the Tent of Meeting do? This is where the Rashi comes in:

Aaron seized the angel of death against its will. The angel said, “Leave me to do my mission.” Aaron said, “Moses commanded me to prevent you.” The angel said, “I am the messenger of God, and you are (only) the messenger of Moses.” Aaron said, “Moses says nothing on his own accord, rather, (he says matters only) through God. If you do not believe me, behold Moses and God are at the Tent of Meeting, come with me and ask” and this is the meaning of “and Aaron returned to Moses” [Num. 17:15]. (Rashi, Num. 17:13).

Moses knew that the people accused him and Aaron of murder. The Jews saw Moses and God as two opposing sides, i.e., Moses was not working in sync with God, as he apparently killed the “people of God,” i.e., Korach and his congregation. The Jews’ accusation “You have killed the people of God” displayed the people’s belief that God was correct to follow, but Moses opposed God’s will. Moses now attempted to correct the Jews, and show that in fact, he and Aaron were not murderers opposing God. Moses sent Aaron to make atonement for the Jews. What was this atonement, and how did it entitle the Jews to be saved from God’s current plague?

The Jews saw Aaron with his incense offering, standing at the place where the last Jew dropped down in death; the plague progressed in a domino fashion. And the Jews now saw that no more Jews were dropping down dead, due to Aaron’s presence with the incense. They were now perplexed: they accused Aaron and Moses as murderers, but Aaron was now healing—not killing—as they previously assumed. This perplexity is what the Rashi described metaphorically as “Aaron seizing the Angel of Death.” Aaron was now

correcting the “opinion” of the people, which earned them death, as if Aaron seized the cause of their death. The peoples’ opinion was in fact, their own “Angel of Death.” This means that the angel is not a real being, but the cause of death is man’s own distance from God. And these Jews were distant from God when they imputed murder to Moses and Aaron.

As the Jews were now second guessing their accusation, but not completely abandoning this false view of Aaron and Moses, the plague stopped, but only temporarily, reflecting their temporal suspension of their accusation. We may interpret Aaron as “seizing the angel of death” as his correction the Jews’ error that Moses and Aaron were murderers. “Seizing the Angel of Death” means Aaron removed the cause of death in the remaining Jews; he corrected their false notions.

When they saw Aaron standing between the living and the dead with incense halting the plague, the Jews were confused. Aaron is Moses’ messenger, but the plague was clearly from God. So, how could Aaron and Moses overpower God? This is what Rashi means when metaphorically the Angel of Death tells Aaron, “I am the messenger of God, and you are (only) the messenger of Moses.” The Angel in this metaphor personifies the false opinions of the people, which caused death. But with a corrected opinion, God will not kill. So, the Angel talking in this metaphor represents the Jewish people’s corrupt opinion, which in fact causes death. (Sometimes, false views can be so wrong that the follower of such a view deserves death.)

Returning to the Rashi, Aaron replies to the Angel one last time, “Moses says nothing on his own accord, rather, (he says matters only) through God. If you do not believe me, behold Moses and God are at the Tent of Meeting, come with me and ask.” At this point, the plague was temporarily stopped, as the Jews were entertaining the idea that Moses and Aaron were not murderers, as Aaron was trying to keep them alive. Their perplexity about whether Aaron and Moses were following God had to be removed if they were to live permanently. This is what is meant that when Aaron returned to the tent of meeting (Num. 17:15) and the plague was terminated completely. As the Jews witnessed Aaron, Moses, and God “together” they now understood that Moses and Aaron were in fact followers of God. The metaphor depicts Aaron as “seizing” the corrupt views of the people which demanded their death, allegorized by seizing the “Angel of Death.”

This Rashi is yet another of literally

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thousands of examples where the Rabbis wrote in riddles, as King Solomon taught in Proverbs 1:6. We learn from King Solomon, to whom God gave knowledge miraculously (Kings I, 3:12) that riddles are a means of education. We must continue to look for the hidden meanings in the Rabbis' words, which at first seem bizarre. We must not take amazing stories literally. There are no demons roaming the Earth, no angels of death, no powers of segulas that protect. God is the only power, and He created the Earth and heavens and all they behold, with distinct, limited physical properties and laws. Physical creation cannot exceed its design: a string dyed red does not suddenly get transformed into a device which wards off God's punishments. It is unfortunate that we have become so idolatrous with red bendels.

What is worse, is that children are taught to accept superstitions. They become prime candidates for missionaries. Superstitious rearing teaches children that Christianity is no different.

This new mystical, pop-kabbalistic Judaism blurs the lines between true Torah principles and all other religions. When Jews fail to see the difference between a superstitious Judaism and other religions, they more easily convert. And they are accurate in this equation: there is no difference between a Judaism that preaches segulas, or that parts of God are "inside man," and between Christianity that makes identical claims.

What parents, teachers, and leaders must do is teach our fundamentals. If Jewish children were taught the "What's" and "Whys" about God's unity; that He is not physical since He created all physical things, that He created everything and nothing possesses powers but He alone, that we cannot know what He is and therefore we can't say "part of God is in man," that His Torah is correct, and why, that He rewards and punishes...if students were taught the proofs behind these ideas, then far less students would abandon their observance. Far more students would find profound reasons to remain observant and continue their studies and grow more dedicated to a Torah life. However, the fundamentals are not being taught.

Maimonides formulated his 13 Principles for a reason. Let's ensure we teach them before anything else. ■



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# WHAT MADE GOD?



*Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim*

When seeing a beam of light hitting a wall at our right, it is not sensible to say that the beam coming from the left travels backwards infinitely, with no light source. With no source, the beam could not exist. Thus, there must be some flashlight, laser or source of light at the beginning of the beam. However far back it goes, it must have a source of origin.

The same applies to creation. It is illogical to say that the universe was created by God, and God was created by Z, and Z was created by Y, and Y

by X, ad infinitum. This suggests that there is no cause for everything. Nothing can exist without a cause. Just as we arrived at the source for the beam of light, we must arrive at a first cause for all that exists. And that first cause is not preceded by anything. Although we don't understand God's existence, an existence independent of all else, the alternative of an endless series of things creating the next thing, is impossible.

We accept the astonishing over the impossible and say that God exists, not preceded by anything. ■

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