

THE 3 WEEKS: A TIME OF REPENTANCE. TZEDAKA EARNS GOD'S FORGIVENESS.

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TZEDAKA:
THE MEASURE
OF PERFECTION

THE JEW
AMONG
THE
NATIONS

MOSES'
ANGER:
A VITAL
LESSON

HOW
TZEDAKA
SAVES FROM
DEATH

WHY
SUPERSTITIONS
ABOUND IN
JEWISH
COMMUNITIES

WHAT DEFINES
A JEW?





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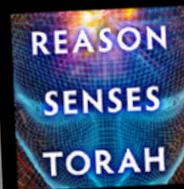
MISSION
God's Revelation at Mt. Sinai: One Plan for Mankind
The greatest event ever witnessed forces one conclusion

MESORA
Summer 2020

EVIDENCE EXISTS for only one event of God revealing His religion to man. All other religions claim divine origin, yet provide no validation. This explains their requirement of "blind faith," which is absent in Judaism: a religion offering proof. 3332 years ago upon Mt. Sinai, God gave us His Bible: the only time God communicated a religion to man. Masses witnessed this, which is the only validation of any historical claim, and why the major religions accept the Bible. Mesora's mission is to share God's Biblical religion with all who seek it. As every human descends from that first couple; all humans are equals. Jews boasting "Jewish Superiority" and those who discriminate against any race violate the Bible and reason. Nearing a quarter century, Mesora helps others realize God's will for us all, sharing the beauty of Biblical wisdom. Search our 1000s of original essays, publications and audio, and write us with your questions. God determined the Jew's role is to share Torah's history, wisdom, laws and moral code with all mankind. As God created all mankind, He loves each person equally. As science has defined laws, God's will for man also has defined laws and principles, and they delight the soul. The greatest minds spent their lives studying God through Torah and science, as they found nothing that compared to its enjoyment. Let us humble ourselves before Moses, Kings David and Solomon, Maimonides, Aristotle, Newton and Einstein who taught that a life of wisdom is the most fulfilling life. We too can partake of this pleasurable existence.

THOUGHT FUNDAMENTALS

"WHAT IS UNDETECTED BY THE SENSES, REASON OR TORAH, MUST NOT BE ACCEPTED AS TRUTH." MAIMONIDES



FEATURED CONTENT



CHARACTER PERFECTION

"PERFECTION" REFERS TO ONE WHOSE VALUES AND ACTIONS COMPLY WITH TORAH PERSONALITIES AND LAWS: THE MOST PLEASANT LIFE.



KINDNESS

As equals, all humans must fully treat others as we wish to be treated. Charity, kindness and justice demand we rise above personal or selfish emotions and recognize that God made others as He made ourselves. Doing so creates harmony, and earns His kindness to us.



RACISM: A LIE

Mankind descends from Adam. Black and white twins unveil the lie of racism. Bible denounces it: Moses' wife was black, our kings married Egyptians and Messiah descends from a Moabite. "Better is the day of A tub" (Eccl. 7:9). Birth doesn't define us, but how

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THE JOURNAL ON JEWISH THOUGHT

| Authors may not have been advised of reprints of their essays |

3 Letters

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

Responding to readers' questions on Jewish superstition and tzedaka.

8 Moshe's Anger

RABBI REUVEN MANN

Moshe's harsh response: Don't be oblivious to negative effects of your words and deeds.

14 Jews & Nations

RABBI BERNIE FOX

The different roles of the patriarchs

6 Principle V

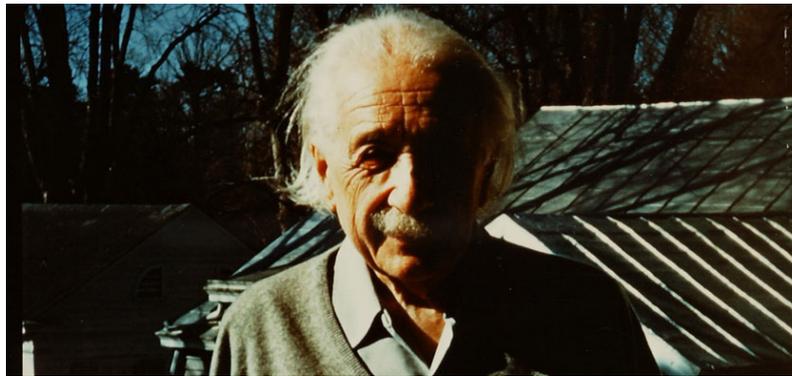
RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

Maimonides' 5th Principle is that we worship God alone. His reasoning is that all else is "natural." What is his message?

10 Tzedaka

RABBI ISRAEL CHAIT

Rabbi Chait shares his analysis of tzedaka and how it embodies human perfection over all else.



"He who can no longer pause to wonder and stand rapt in awe, is as good as dead; his eyes are closed."

ALBERT EINSTEIN

LETTERS

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

How Superstition Infiltrated Torah Life

READER: Shalom aleichem Rabbi. Deuteronomy 18:10-12 forbids all sort of false, superstitious beliefs and practices:

Let no one be found among you who consigns his son or daughter to the fire, or who is a fortune teller, a soothsayer, a diviner, a sorcerer, one who casts spells, or one who consults ghosts or familiar spirits, or one who inquires of the dead. For anyone who does such things is abhorrent to the LORD, and it is because of these abhorrent things that the LORD your God is dispossessing those nations from before you.

Where, when and how did all the present false practices like astrology, praying to the dead, red strings, talisman, amulet, and invoking angels names creep its way into Toras Moshe [Judaism]? Was the Rambam and Rashbam orthodox or orthoprax? Thank you.

Mark Stanley Gomez
Vetturnimadam, India

RABBI: Mark, Rambam, Rashbam and all our great Rabbis followed Torah, which means they followed truth and what reality validates. They all rejected what is not validated by reality, like astrology, and Rambam wrote his Letter to Marseilles to this effect.

(CONT. ON NEXT PAGE)

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Man is insecure by nature, but he is to mature and follow Torah which opposes the baseless claims that superstitions and idolatry alter reality, claims that have never been substantiated throughout history. But the human psyche is insecure, commencing life as a dependent infant, and although maturing physically, many people remain psychologically infantile until death. They can't abandon their need for the parent. So as they age and come to realize their parents are not the powerful beings once thought to be in the child's infancy, they seek replacements. Idolatry and superstitions now step in to provide a sense of security for these individuals as these practices "forecast the future." They eliminate the unknown. The fear of the future is now removed with beliefs in "powers" that favor their success. And even with failure after failure, people don't abandon their superstitions. This unveils just how out of touch with reality these people are.

Despite Torah prohibitions, insecure people follow their fantasies, instead of following God. God's prohibitions exist precisely due to man's false emotional leanings and fears. The Gold Calf is a prime example of Jews creating superstitions and idols which are defenseless and provide no power. Moses' destruction of that idol should be a lesson of idolatry's lifeless and powerless nature. Yet, Jews throughout time have committed idolatry and still today believe in powers of red bendels, keys in challahs, they think mezuzah physically protects them, and they disregard great minds like Rambam and Meharsha who condemn those who place trust in the mezuzah for physical protection. Mezuzah's true intent is to remind us of God, the same as tefillin and tzitzis. And as one can burn a mezuzah, as it is defenseless of itself, how can it be imagined it offers protection for anything else?!

The only cure for these false notions is Torah study. Our prophets repeatedly denounced idolatry. And in their denouncements can be found sublime reasoning that Jews can use to abandon these idolatrous ways. Haftoras Vayikra includes these verses:

The makers of idols all work to no purpose; and the things they treasure can do no good, as they themselves can testify. They (idols) neither look nor think, and so they shall be shamed. Who would fashion a god or cast a statue that can do no good? (Isaiah 44:9,10)



The prophet tells the Jews that their idols neither see or think. How then can a one bow to it? Radak severely criticizes one as foolish, who labors and expends money to create emptiness [lifeless idols]. The same applies to Jews today wearing lifeless red strings, imagining that this red emptiness protects from other imagined things like evil eyes. Isaiah continues:

For his use he cuts down cedars; he chooses plane trees and oaks. He sets aside trees of the forest; or plants firs, and the rain makes them grow. All this serves man for fuel. He takes some (wood) to warm himself, and he builds a fire and bakes bread. He also makes a god of it and worships it, he fashions an idol and bows down to it! (Ibid 10:14,15)

The prophet tells the Jew to recognize their contradiction. The same stump of wood they view as firewood, they also carve into idols. Rabbi Israel Chait said the prophet's message is this very contrast, that one should see his contradiction.

Part of it he burns in a fire: On that part he roasts meat, he eats the roast and is sated; he also warms himself and cries, "Ah, I am warm! I can feel the heat!" Of the rest he makes a god—his own carving! He bows down to it, worships it; he prays to it and cries, "Save me, for you are my god!" They have no wit or judgment: Their eyes are plastered from seeing and their hearts are plastered from understanding. They do not give thought, they lack the wit and judgment

to say, "Part of it I burned in a fire; I also baked bread on the coals, I roasted meat and ate it— Should I make the rest an abhorrence? Should I bow to a block of wood?" He pursues ashes! A deluded mind has led him astray, And he cannot save himself; He never says to himself, "The thing in my right hand is a fraud!" (Ibid 10:16,20)

The prophet repeats his message. But now he describes the Jews' crime of not trusting their eyes which see no help from idols, and their crime of not using their minds which should question any distinction between two halves of a single block of wood. Both, physical reality and common sense invalidate this wood as deserving deification. The Jews' sin is in denying their senses and their minds. Torah demands one follow reality. God gave man senses precisely to trust them. He gave us minds, precisely that we follow its dictates.

Today, what more can we add to the prophet's words? The only cure to superstitious and idolatrous beliefs is to study Torah and nature. Share the prophets' teachings, and hopefully misled Jews might open their plastered eyes and minds. But the Jew must also abandon the need for peer approval. This is the harmful element of cultures, and why orthodox community members follow superstitions. It's not that all community members agree with a practice, but they fear being ostracized if they would deviate. The fear of condemnation and the need for approval forces many people to follow the masses, regardless of the masses' insanity to believe superstitions and idolatry. This is why Abraham was so great: he deviated from the idolatrous world as his mind told him they were all wrong. His independent thought steered him towards monotheism, and ultimately, to God's prophetic communication. God established Abraham as the founding father of Judaism. Thus, Judaism is literally built upon independent thought rooted in reason, proof and the love of truth. One cannot separate reason and proof from Judaism. But those who follow superstitions and idolatrous practices, be they amulets, notes to dead rabbis, notes in walls, checking mezuzahs, and wearing red bendels are diametrically opposed to Abraham and the core of Judaism. The rabbis teach, "All who endorse idolatry deny all of Torah" (Rashi, Num. 15:23). ■



How Tzedaka Prevents Death

READER: I have a question regarding charity. How does it save someone from death, as stated in Proverbs 10:2 and Daniel 4:24?

Omphile Tshipa
Africa

RABBI: Proverbs chapter 10:2 reads as follows: *“Storehouses of evil will not help, and charity saves from death.”* The first part of the verse rejects man’s belief that wealth is a security: wealth is limited to this life alone, and what’s limited, can’t provide security. People have a grave misconception that wealth is absolute security, as they don’t accept their own mortality. Earthly life is the only reality to most people; they deny death. Furthermore, Metsudas Dovid says that evilly-gained wealth will not defend a person when God punishes him.

Deflating man’s belief in immortality and security on Earth, true security concerns a person’s soul. In direct opposition to amassing wealth, Torah says here that giving charity is the true security for the true life, the soul’s life, and even saves one from earthly death and death of one’s soul. King Solomon draws a stark contrast stating that amassing wealth does not produce security for one’s life, whereas giving wealth does. How does this work?

Rabbi Israel Chait said that charity is the greatest indication of human perfection because one trusts in God to the point of giving away his money. He added, “In tzedaka, one realizes the entire world belongs to God.” When a person has this realization, he no longer finds it easy to sin, as sin is generated from a self-deserving

feeling. But when giving tzedaka, one recognizes that all belongs to God. Avos 3:7 states, “Rabbi Elazar, man of Bartuta, says: “Give Him from what is His, for you and yours are His, and thus with David it says, ‘For all comes from You, and from Your hand we have given to You’” (I chronicles 29:14).

How is charity unique over all other acts, that it saves one from death?

Man’s greatest difficulty is parting with his money, with his physical security. Trusting in God means a person’s sense of reality is not physical (wealth), but is God, who can override laws of nature. Wealth is not his absolute trust; God is. Giving charity shows that the person is convinced that he will not suffer monetarily. Typically, when a person gives away wealth, he has less. But the perfected person knows when he gives charity that there’s another system which can give him his needs...regardless of the charity that diminished his wealth.

It then follows that God’s laws—His metaphysical system that overrides the physical world—finds its greatest expression when one is even saved from death due to tzedaka. Tzedaka can override the most severe physical laws, i.e., death. Tzedaka, then, is man’s greatest expression of his conviction that physical laws are subjugated to God’s laws of providence. Providence is more real to the righteous and intelligent person. Giving tzedaka—man’s most difficult challenge and his greatest expression of faith in God—earns the donor God’s greatest providential act of saving his life. It is yet another display of God’s “Measure for Measure” method of governing man: for man’s greatest act of tzedaka, God performs the greatest good of saving his life.

King Solomon contrasts limited physical laws to God’s absolute overriding providence. He contrasts man’s concern with immortal physical life, with the true immortality: that of the soul. ■

MAIMONIDES:

PRINCIPLE V

That He, blessed be He, is fit to worship, to praise, and make known His greatness and to perform His commands. And not to act in this manner to one who is below Him in existence, [whether] from the angels, the stars, the planets, the elements [matter] or what is constructed from them. For they are all natural, and concerning their behaviors there is no governing or choice, except [by] He alone, God, blessed be He. And so also it is not fitting to serve any of these that they become intermediaries to draw close to Him. Rather, to God alone must man's thoughts be intent, and abandon all else. And this is the Fifth Principle that Torah has warned us against idolatry, and most of Torah warns against this.”

Maimonides explains why anything but God is unfit to worship: “For they are all ‘natural’, and concerning their behaviors, there is no governing or choice.” This statement has great meaning. By “natural,” Maimonides means that everything except God has been “designed.” Design refers to a defined and static scope of form and function, what we call “nature.” The nature of “tree” is different than the nature of “animal.” Their behaviors are distinct and fixed.

Nothing can deviate from its design. Thus, to project onto a rock that it possesses an ability to protect, wrongly assumes the rock's nature is other than what God defined. Nothing can deviate from its nature. Thus, idols, red strings, mezuzas, stars, and all else cannot affect man's fate, as God did not design them with such a capacity. God alone controls man's fate based on reward and punishment. To suggest a wicked person can escape a punishment by using red bendel or mezuzas, renders God unjust, and not in control. Astrology, luck, magic, spells, evil eyes, amulets, etc. are all false as none were never validated throughout history. Nor can a human being do more than what his muscular strength allows.

All existences except God are natural: they are limited. They are unworthy of worship and praise, nor may they be valued for what they cannot accomplish.

We begin to appreciate Maimonides' brilliance in isolating his 13 Principles as fundamentals in defining who is a Jew, and who is outside its pale. ■

WHAT DEFINES A JEW?

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

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Uncharacteristic Anger

RABBI REUVEN MANN

This week the parshas of Matot and Masei complete the fourth Book of the Torah, Bamidbar. This very sad Book is filled with setbacks and disappointments, the greatest of which is the decree that the liberated slaves would not merit to enter the land of Israel because of the sin of the Spies.

Not only that, but the triumvirate of Moshe, Aaron, and their sister Miriam would not accompany the Jews into the Promised Land. A new generation that had not experienced slavery in Egypt would, under the aegis of a new leader, Joshua, complete the mission that began when Moshe stood before Pharaoh and commanded him to “Send forth My nation that they may serve Me in the Wilderness.”

At this point, the 40 years of wandering are complete and once again the people are on the brink of invading Canaan. However, a strange incident occurred, which revealed that the lingering effects of the Meraglim (Spies) debacle were still a matter of concern.

The tribes of Reuven and Gad had large holdings of livestock, and the newly conquered lands on the Eastern side of the Jordan were ideal for pasture. They approached Moshe with an offer. They were willing to forfeit all rights to any portion of the land on the Jordan’s Western bank if they could be granted possession of the recently acquired territories.

Upon hearing this, Moshe became furious. He lashed out and accused the two Tribes of repeating the sin of the Spies. Moshe minced no words in his heated condemnation and made no attempt to ascertain their actual motives and intentions. This was extremely uncharacteristic of Moshe, who generally bore the most vexing provocations with great

DEDICATION

This Dvar Torah is dedicated to the memory of my talmid, Mr. Arthur Heiman Z”L who was a Holocaust survivor and a very unique personality. When he retired in 1992 he came to study in Yeshiva B’nei Torah and was in my Shiur for 13 years. His intense commitment to learning and pleasant disposition were an inspiration to all the students of the Yeshiva. May his memory be a blessing for his family, friends and all who knew him.



MOSE CONSECRAATES JOSHUA

patience.

Why didn’t Moshe extend the benefit of the doubt? It seems that he was guilty here of a rush to judgment. But what was the sin of the petitioners? On the surface, their request does not seem outrageous. If Moshe was opposed to it, all he had to do was declare unequivocally, No!

The request of the two tribes did manifest selfishness, because it showed no regard for the welfare of Klal Yisrael. The people might interpret their “separation from the community” as being based on fear of fighting the inhabitants of Canaan, and this could trigger a panic, such as the one that had led to the original calamity of the Spies. All they could think about was their own needs.

Contrast this with Moshe’s behavior. When Hashem instructed Moshe to go up Mount Abarim and see the Land G-d had given the Jews, after which he would be “gathered unto his people,” he requested that Hashem

should appoint a new leader “who shall go out before them and come in before them” so the “assembly of Hashem not be like sheep that have no shepherd.”

Moshe was only concerned about the effect his death would have on Klal Yisrael. His prime goal was to perpetuate the Torah way of life through Hashem’s chosen nation. Even as he approached death, his primary preoccupation was for the welfare of the Jewish people.

It was from this perspective that he considered the proposal of Reuven and Gad. He did not claim that they were guilty in an intentional, premeditated fashion. They weren’t deliberately plotting to discourage the Jews from the conquest. But that would have been the inevitable effect of their proposal—so how could they not have noticed it? (CONT. ON NEXT PAGE)

Their intense focus on material concerns made them oblivious to all other considerations. It wasn't sinful to be solicitous about their source of sustenance, but not to the point where this made them ignore the needs of the Jewish People.

As a result of Moshe's reprimand, the tribes came to their senses and offered guarantees exceeding what was required. They possessed a quality sorely in need today, the ability to accept rebuke and make amends. They promised to join their brothers in the vanguard of the battle and remain with them until all the tribes were settled in their inheritance. Only then would they return to their homesteads on the eastern side of the Jordan.

We must learn the lessons of this story. All Jews are responsible one for another. The welfare of Klal Yisrael should never fade from our consciousness and we should always pay attention to the possible, though unintended, consequences of our words and deeds.

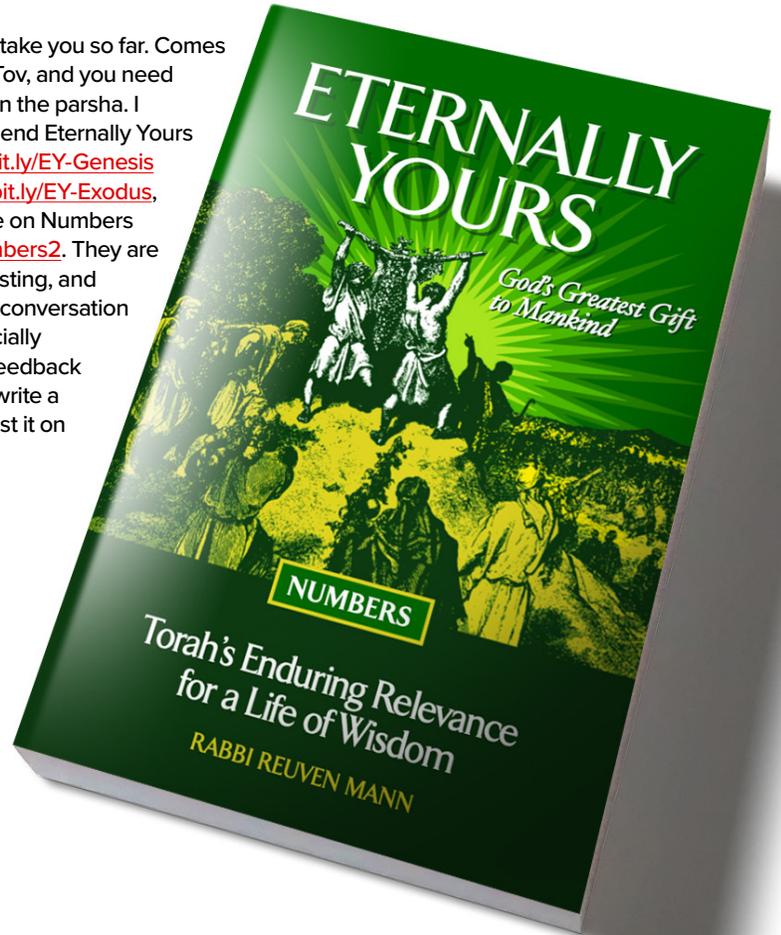
All of our prayers are formulated in terms of the tzibbur (community). We thereby declare that Hashem has chosen the Jewish nation and request our needs in the merit of being members in good standing of that exalted group. Let us always seek its welfare.

Shabbat shalom. ■

Dear Friends,

In this time of "social isolation," we should seek ways to avoid boredom by staying occupied with meaningful activity. The world of virtual reality allows us to stay in touch with friends and attend all kinds of classes available online.

But that can only take you so far. Comes Shabbat and Yom Tov, and you need books, especially on the parsha. I personally recommend Eternally Yours on Genesis <http://bit.ly/EY-Genesis> and Exodus <http://bit.ly/EY-Exodus>, and my newest one on Numbers <http://bit.ly/EY-Numbers2>. They are easy to read, interesting, and thought-provoking conversation starters. I am especially interested in your feedback and hope you can write a brief review and post it on Amazon.



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Tzedaka: Judaism's Core & Man's Perfection

RABBI ISRAEL CHAIT

Written by a student



Rabbeinu Yona says that one who does not give tzedaka is a rasha, for he can't perceive of tzedaka due to his inherent character. He cannot tolerate tzedaka and is thereby a rasha. But if one gives tzedaka, as Torah says it is proper, he is an intermediate person and not a rasha. He does not give tzedaka intrinsically, but only after being told to do so. The greatest imperfection is one who relates improperly to his possessions. This explains a passage in tefilas Neilah: "So that we abandon the oppression of our hands and that we repent and perform the statutes of Your will with a complete heart" (Yom Kippurc losing Neilah prayer). The last moment before Yom Kippur passes, we mention this theme. The worst sin is not overcoming one's sense of possession. The chassid, the pious man says, "What's mine is yours and what's yours is yours." He operates on a different level which is the underlying concept of tzedaka; the height of tzedaka. Tzedaka forms the very core of Judaism. Wherever one looks in Torah one finds tzedaka:

For I have selected him, that he may instruct his children and his posterity to keep the way of the Lord by doing what is tzedaka and righteousness ... (Gen. 18:19)

God's very first words to Abraham regarding the founding of the nation concerns tzedaka: the institution that is Judaism's very essence and core.

And Rabbi Chiyya bar Rav of Difti taught, Rabbi Yehoshua ben Korcha says:

"Anyone who averts his eyes from the obligation to give charity, it is as if he engages in idol worship. It is written here concerning charity: 'Beware that there be not a base [beliya'al] thought in your heart...and you will not give him' (Deut. 15:9), and it is written there concerning idolatry: 'Certain base [beliya'al] fellows have gone out' (Ibid. 13:14). Just as there, in the latter verse, the word 'base [beliya'al]' is referring to idol worship, so too here [regarding abstention from charity] this expression [beliya'al] indicates a sin equal to idol worship" (Kesuvos 68a). (CONT. ON NEXT PAGE)

Why is an uncharitable person considered an idolater? He's a metaphysician, he believes in God, he has knowledge! You would not think such a person is on par with an idolater. Maimonides explains why this is so at the end of his Guide (book III, chap. liv):

Thus, says the Lord, "Let not the wise man glory in his [moral] wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches. But let him that glorifies himself glory in this: that he understands and knows Me, for I the Lord act with kindness, justice, and tzedaka in the world; for these I desire," declares the Lord. (Jer. 9:22,23)

Knowledge of God means that one possesses knowledge of the total reality; he understands the source of all reality as far as he is capable. He is related to God. In this matter, a person can feel proud. This pride is not egoism. It is the one healthy pride permitted to us. This pride is where one realizes his place in the universe, which is tied to the greatest humility. This is because once a person realizes his place in universe, he is filled with the greatest humility. "...for I the Lord act with kindness, justice, and tzedaka in the world; for these I desire," declares the Lord. Maimonides says, [God says], "as I am, so should you be" [mah Ani, af atah]. This means that if a person perceives God's character [middos Hashem], his own charitable acts should be a natural result. One should give tzedaka because God gives tzedaka. One understands that this is the underlying system of the universe and the scheme of creation. Once a person understands that, his meager positions are worthless. That is why tzedaka is the mark of an individual's level of perfection. If one possesses all other perfections but not tzedaka, it is worthless. He is a fraud because he may have intellectual knowledge, and he might be a great scholar and rav, but it's all worthless, because without giving tzedaka the person does not believe in what he is saying. His emotions don't follow his mind. Tzedaka is the barometer of perfection. Why does the Gemara equate the uncharitable person to an idolater? This is because his idea of God must be distorted. Torah holds of a psychological principle: If one harbors a bad trait and does not break it, his mind must become distorted. It is impossible to quarantine a bad trait where it will not affect the rest of one's personality and intellect. Why did Chazal prohibit the study of metaphysics until one excels to a great level? It is because one cannot obtain knowledge while harboring emotional distortions. Here, Judaism disagrees with the world's educational institutions which have no demand for prerequisite intellectual training or prerequisite character perfection. One cannot be a great metaphysician while partaking of poor character. Poor character must affect

one's mind; it is impossible otherwise. This is a foregone conclusion in Judaism. This is why we are prohibited from reading the writings of flawed personalities. This is why the rabbis wrote Pirkei Avos. Without perfection, all areas of study will be distorted. Maimonides says that one can study Torah, but if he has the wrong idea about God, he has no portion in Olam Haba [the afterlife]. Tzedaka is the barometer [of perfection]. If one gives, then his ideas about God are true: "...for I the Lord act with kindness, justice, and tzedaka in the world; for these I desire," declares the Lord.

That refers to metaphysical knowledge. Judaism's metaphysician is not limited to the intellect, but to metaphysics regarding God and how He relates to the world. Judaism's metaphysician will follow the principle of imitating God—"as I am, so shall you be"—and he will give tzedaka because he is in line with God's will to be charitable. But if one's idea of God is corrupt [as he does not give tzedaka] he is akin to an idolater, for the definition of idolatry is harboring a wrong notion about God. If one's idea of God is correct, he would have to copy God; it is a natural result. Maimonides says, "*The perfected individual emulates God and acts towards the creatures [people] as God does.*" Meaning, just as God does not act out of selfishness [as God is bereft of all emotions] and God's actions are purely in terms of His wisdom, so too an individual must remove himself from his emotion of selfishness and operate on a broader perspective of sustaining the species, acting out of kindness for others apart from himself [his own emotional desires] and apart from his own interests. But as long as one is tied to his self-interests like selfishness, self-recognition, and money, he is not functioning in a way similar to God but on an instinctual plane. Whereas God is completely removed from any instinctual activity.

And you shall sanctify yourselves and be holy, for I am holy (Lev. 11:44)

How are we holy like God? This is achieved by acting without any instinct, acting purely objectively. When operating under this framework of kindness, one performs a different type of kindness. This is why the mishnah discussing the 4 traits of man—Avos 5:10—commences with the discussion of man's possessions, for this is the area of perfection: tzedaka is the barometer of perfection. In fact, the only mitzvah where God says one can test Him is tzedaka:

Please test Me in this said the Lord of Hosts. I will surely open the storehouses of heaven and empty out for you a blessing that is more than sufficient (Malachi 3:10). (CONT. ON NEXT PAGE)



This means that God returns one's tzedaka tenfold. Chazal say that one cannot perform a mitzvah just to receive a reward, but in tzedaka it is permissible. This is because if it is performed properly, it means God has to return the kindness because God is the source of all kindness, of all tzedaka.

Why is the idea of tzedaka the most paramount and basic idea in Judaism?

It is because tzedaka runs contrary to a very strong type of thinking: "hedonistic logic" as I would call it. Hedonistic logic tells you that if you give something away, you are losing. And you cannot show that to be wrong. But the essence of Judaism is that this type of logic is absolutely false. Beyond the hedonistic reality is a greater reality. If one is not in line with that greater reality he is simply not in line with Judaism. He denies the whole basis of Judaism, which is that a reality exists beyond the physical and instinctual reality that man perceives sensually. [God's promise above of abundant wealth for giving tzedaka overrides the hedonistic mathematical logic.] When one gives tzedaka it is not a loss, but a gain, because now he is in line with God. [The physical world is governed by laws that God created, controls and alters through His providence. All miracles in Torah convey this message, as does this promise of wealth if one tests God in tzedaka.] Who is the chassid, the pious individual? The Gemara says that Yoav ben Tzaruya had no concept of possession. They say his home was "in the desert." But would such a prominent person live in the desert? In actuality it means that his home was "like" a desert, where anyone could just walk in. [Yoav ben Tzaruya did not act like an owner regarding his home, but it was as publicly accessible as is the desert.] This is the very nucleus of Judaism. The chassid views other creatures just like God views them, but in a human manner. He views others with total objectivity and understands that they must operate with the institution of possession, since they cannot survive otherwise. That is, people must have an outlet for their

egocentricity [which is expressed in ownership]. The chassid's personality is "what's mine is yours and what's yours is yours." He is above that concept [of ownership]. He gives tzedaka like God. His possessions are not "his" in his eyes. (One must reciprocate good done for him and be charitable and perform kindness first, to those who showed him kindness.)

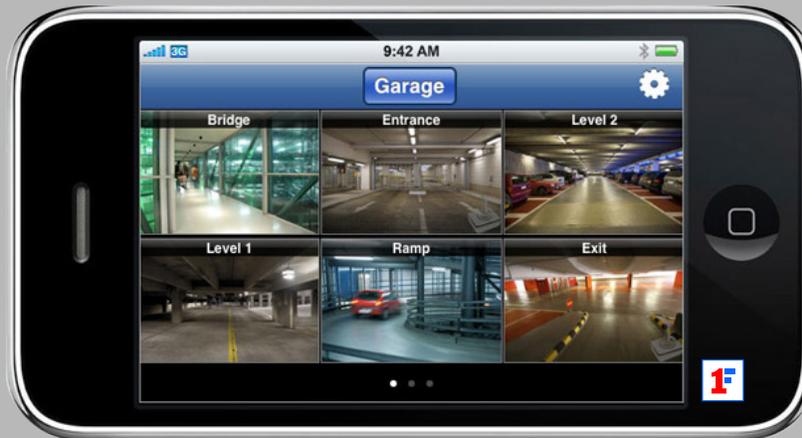
The Gemara says that if one does not give tzedaka, God takes that money from him. He may not even know how God does this. But despite this [God taking it from him] it is still considered as if he gave tzedaka. This is because through losing his possessions and his realization that his loss was due to his failure to give tzedaka, it is considered tzedaka because the person broke his emotion [his attachment to money, through recognizing his flaw]. Very few people give 10% tzedaka; it is a difficult mitzvah. I know only a handful of people who fulfill the mitzvah. And it is unrelated to one's financial status. If one does not give tzedaka when he is poor, he will not give when he is rich, and vice versa. It [generous character] is a personality trait, a perception. Maimonides says that no one becomes poor by giving tzedaka. A person will say, "If I had \$10 million, I would give \$1 million to tzedaka." But he says this now only because the money is presently not his. But the moment it is his, he can't give it away.

The Gemara says that tzedaka is performed with one's money, but kindness is greater since it is performed with one's money and one's body [actions]. Any person who gives tzedaka because of the true reason must be on the highest level. This perfection is related to knowledge of God. God is the creator of the entire universe and what He gives is pure kindness and not to satisfy any emotion [as He has no emotions]. Abraham gave Malchitzedek tzedaka, for he was a priest to God:

And King Malchitzedek of Salem brought out bread and wine; he was a priest of God Most High. He blessed him, saying, "Blessed be Abram of God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth. And blessed be God Most High, Who has delivered your foes into your hand." And [Abram] gave him a tenth of everything. (Gen. 14:18-20)

Malchitzedek had a yeshiva where he taught true ideas. That was Yeshivas Shame v'Ever. ■

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RABBI BERNIE FOX



And Yaakov settled in the land in which his father lived – in the Land of Canaan. (Sefer Beresheit 37:1)

1. The Patriarchs as humanity's teachers

Parshat VaYeshev opens with the above passage. In its discussion of this passage, the Midrash explains that each of the Patriarchs was committed to the mission of educating humanity. Each denounced idolatry and communicated the message that Hashem alone should be worshiped.

Maimonides also discusses this issue. He describes Avraham's extensive efforts to teach these truths to humanity. He explains that Avraham appointed Yitzchak to continue his work. Avraham charged Yitzchak with the task of teaching and reforming humanity. Yitzchak appointed Yaakov to continue this mission. However, Maimonides indicates that Yaakov's mission was somewhat different than that of his father and grandfather. Yaakov's mission was to teach. He was not charged with the responsibility of rehabilitating humanity. It seems that according to Maimonides, Avraham and Yitzchak shared the mission of teaching and restoring humanity to the worship of Hashem. Yaakov also shared this mission. However, it was not his focus. He did not teach primarily in order to reform humanity. He taught to preserve and communicate the truths developed by his father and grandfather. This could be achieved without directing his attention to the nations of the land. Therefore, his focus was upon the teaching and development of Bnai Yisrael.

And Avraham called the name of that place "Hashem will See". Today, it is said,

"On Hashem's Mountain He will be seen". (Sefer Beresheit 22:14)

And Yitzchak went forth to meditate in the field toward evening. He lifted his eyes and he saw that camels were coming. (Sefer Beresheit 24:63)

And he was frightened and he said: How awe-inspiring is this place. This must be the house of G-d and the gateway of heaven. (Sefer Beresheit 28:17)

2. The unique element of each Patriarch's mission

The first of the above passages appears in the Torah narrative of the Akeydah – Avraham's binding of Yitzchak in order to offer him as a sacrifice. After Hashem's angel tells Avraham that Yitzchak is not to be sacrificed, Avraham gives a name to the mountain that was the site of the encounter.

The second passage appears in the Torah's description of Yitzchak and Rivkah's initial encounter. Yitzchak is described as meditating in a field.

The final passage appears in the Torah description of Yaakov's first prophecy. This prophecy was received by Yaakov as he began his journey from his father's home to the Charan. Upon awaking from the prophetic dream, Yaakov was frightened. He recognized the sanctity of the place at which he had received the prophecy and described it as the house of Hashem and the gateway of heaven.

The Talmud explains that all of these events occurred at a single place. The Akeydah, Yitzchak and Rivkah's encounter, and Yaakov's dream all took place

(CONT. ON NEXT PAGE)

upon Mount Moriah. This site was destined to be the location of the Bait HaMikdash – the Holy Temple. The Talmud notes that this single site is described differently in these three passages. In the context of Avraham’s visit, the site is described as a mountain. Yitzchak is described as meditating in a field. Yaakov refers to the site as the house of Hashem. Why is this single location described with three different terms?

An interesting explanation is attributed to Rav Avraham Kook Z”L. Avraham confronted humanity as a lone voice. He had a message that was novel and alien. In order to be effective in communicating his message, he had to break down barriers of ignorance and primitivism. As a pioneer, he was required to be a teacher and publicist. Figuratively, he delivered his message from a mountain top. His success required that he capture the attention of the inhabitants of the land, and that he maintain a high level of visibility.

Avraham succeeded in introducing to humanity the imperative of serving Hashem alone and the falsehood of idolatry. After Avraham, the message was known. Some accepted Avraham’s ideas. Many more continued to reject his message. However, the message was no longer novel or revolutionary. Therefore, Yitzchak’s mission was different than his father’s. He continued to teach and to reform humanity’s religious notions. However, unlike Avraham, he did not need to do his work from the top of a mountain. Figuratively, he performed his mission upon an open field. He welcomed all who wished to be his students. He was humanity’s teacher but he was not a publicist.

Yaakov built walls and created a house. Before Yaakov, truth was spread by Avraham and Yitzchak to all of humanity. However, it had no home. No nation was dedicated to consistently upholding and embodying the messages of Avraham and Yitzchak. Yaakov continued to teach humanity. However, his focus was on creating a house – a nation that would be devoted to the truths of the Torah.

And you should observe and perform (them) for it is your wisdom and intelligence in the eyes of the nations. For they will hear of all these laws and they will say: This great nation is truly wise and understanding. For what (other) great nation is there whose G-d is close to it – like Hashem, our G-d – at all times that we call out to Him? What other nation has just laws and statutes like this entire Torah that I have placed before you today? (Sefer Devarim 4:6-8)

3. Bnai Yisrael as a light to the nations

An important question remains. Why did the mission of the Patriarchs’ change over the generations? Specifically, Avraham and Yitzchak focused on the teaching of humanity. Yaakov’s focus was on the creation of Bnai Yisrael. Why was Yaakov’s mission different than his father’s and grandfather’s?

The above passages speak to this issue. These passages are part of Moshe’s final address to Bnai Yisrael. He explains to the nation that faithful observance of the Torah will earn the respect of the nations of the world. However, Moshe’s message is somewhat confusing. First, he asserts that when Bnai Yisrael observes the Torah then the nations will recognize the wisdom of its laws and statutes. Then, he asserts that the nations’ admiration will be in response to the providential relationship between Hashem and Bnai Yisrael. He then returns to and reiterates his initial assertion. The impression that is communicated by his presentation is that the nations’ admiration is linked to both appreciation of the wisdom of the Torah and to their recognition of the reality of providence. Furthermore, these two factors are somehow intimately related to one another.

Apparently, the messages communicated by the wisdom of the Torah and the reality of providence are complementary. Together, these two messages communicate to the world that the providence enjoyed by a nation is a consequence of its behaviors and attitudes. We are not rewarded simply for obedience. The Torah outlines for us a set of behaviors and attitudes that are wise and intelligent. By virtue of our travel along the Torah’s path of wisdom we enjoy Hashem’s providence. In other words, Hashem rewards us for acting intelligently and if we expect to be rewarded, we must conduct ourselves in an intelligent manner.

4. Teaching the Patriarchal message through example

This is essentially the message taught to the world by the Patriarchs. They did not call upon humanity to adopt a revealed religion. None existed. They did not demand obedience to a prophetic teaching. Instead, they beseeched humanity to abandon superstition, ignorance, and primitivism. They asked only that humanity act intelligently. They asserted that if humanity adopted intelligent behaviors and attitudes, then it would enjoy the blessing of providence.

Now, the generational transition of the Patriarchs’ mission can be understood. Avraham and Yitzchak were teachers to humanity. However, their lessons were somewhat abstract. They could not provide a compelling demonstration of their message. Each of the Patriarchs enjoyed a providential relationship with Hashem. The Torah explains that at times this relationship was evident to the nations and they were impressed. However, Yaakov established a nation whose destiny and history would provide profound and compelling testimony to the Patriarchal message. Bnai Yisrael’s history and destiny would perfectly reflect this message. Providence and observance of the Torah’s intelligent, wise and just commandments would be directly related.

In short, Avraham and Yitzchak had no option other than to teach with words. Yaakov initiated a new method of teaching. He established a nation whose existence would teach by example. ■

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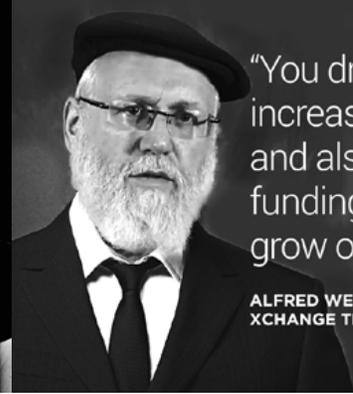
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