

JewishTimes

VOL. XVIII NO. 19 — JULY 31, 2020

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NEW WEBSITE

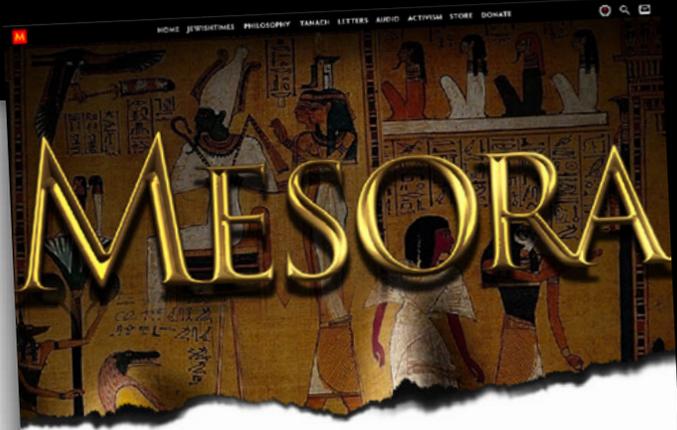
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Mesora has toiled tirelessly to create a better design and user experience. New homepage sections will be updated regularly, and now access all library portals easily on smartphones with horizontal scrolling and drop-down menus.

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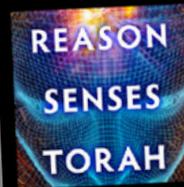
MISSION
God's Revelation at Mt. Sinai: One Plan for Mankind
The greatest event ever witnessed forces one conclusion

MESORA
Summer 2020

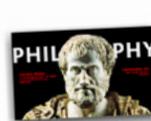
EVIDENCE EXISTS for only one event of God revealing His religion to man. All other religions claim divine origin, yet provide no validation. This explains their requirement of "blind faith," which is absent in Judaism: a religion offering proof. 3332 years ago upon Mt. Sinai, God gave us His Bible: the 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-tube" (Ecc. 7:9). Birth doesn't define us, but how

JewishTimes

THE JOURNAL ON JEWISH THOUGHT

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

3 Letters

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

Readers and friends ask riveting questions.

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RABBI REUVEN MANN

What is it about the Jewish people?

6 Fire

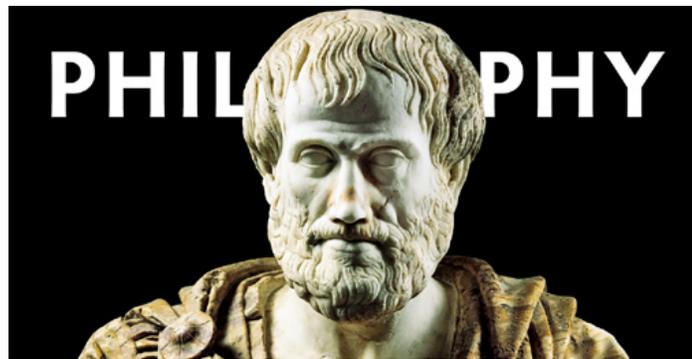
NOTEWORTHY: PARSHA

Why does Moses stress 8 times that God spoke to us on Sinai "from inside fire?" Why did God do it?

10 Prior for a Reason

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

Rashi underlines Moses' fundamental lesson.



"It is the mark of an educated mind to be able to entertain a thought without accepting it."

ARISTOTLE

LETTERS

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

Does God Observe Torah?

FRIEND: Does God observe the Torah?

*Adam New
Long Island, NY*

RABBI: Torah addresses the human condition, including our emotions, behaviors, thoughts and interactions with others. And Torah teaches us truths. As such, Torah cannot apply to God, who is not human and Who authored all truths. He cannot learn. However, Torah does embody God's values: God says all found in Torah is what He determines is valuable. Torah also says we are to mimic God, so there is some "sharing" between man and God, but not that God is similar to man or anything in any way. We don't know what He is, but we know His ways as

stated in Torah. So, although God is not "obligated" in giving charity as a man is, charity is a value in God's eyes, and thus, God is charitable towards His creatures. God does not operate with stubbornness which is a human emotion typically bent on ego. So God says we are not to be petty but to forgive, as this is a perfected trait where man rises above his emotions and acts as God acts. Man requires this perfection, God does not, so Torah is not followed by God. But Torah shares God's values.

Can God Do Anything?

FRIEND: Isn't God unlimited? Can't He do anything?

*Adam New
Long Island, NY*

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RABBI: God is perfect, but He is not unlimited. He lacks nothing, as nothing can impose restriction on the Creator. But saying that God is limited is correct, and is not an imperfection. God cannot be ignorant. This is a limitation, but it is a positive trait. Again, limitation does not indicate something negative, that God is imperfect or lacking. If a judge could not make a mistake, if he was limited to always deciding the correct verdict, we would certainly say he is a perfect judge. This limitation is not a negative, but a positive. We must abandon our infantile views that, “God can do anything,” like Superman. Torah contains immense brilliance, and we must not assume notions we learned as children are correct, while Torah is false. Torah teaches that God knows all, so this limitation that God cannot be ignorant is a truth, while “God doing anything” (even making Himself ignorant) is false. We must be objective, and view our ideas as if they are someone else’s ideas, with which we can disagree when exposed as false.

Justified Hatred

READER: Shalom Aleichem Rabbi.

1. Is it a commandment to hate the rasha [one who is evil to the core]?
2. If someone tried to murder us or someone is always jealous, gossips and slanders and wants our downfall, is it a mitzvah to hate such a person?
3. Is there a differentiation between hating Hashem’s enemy i.e with utmost hatred (Tehillim 139) and hating our own enemy with lesser hate?

*Thank you,
Mark Stanley Gomez
Vetturimadam, India*

RABBI: Psalms 139:21,22 reads, “Is it not so that I hate Your haters, and loathe Your adversaries? I possess the epitome of hatred toward Your enemies.” One must hate those who oppose God’s will. It is not a personal hatred, but a desire that God’s will is not extinguished, thereby harming others. It is a desire that all who desire God can approach Him without opposition. Maimonides teaches that we must hate those who oppose the 13

Principles. This hatred applies to those like Amalek, Haman, Hitler, Hamas, Hezbollah, suicide bombers, Palestinian terrorists, murderers and the like. I don’t think King David’s “epitome of hatred” is a different hatred. In fact, Ibn Ezra says this means that King David hated God’s enemies as if the evil was directed at King David himself. Not that it is a greater hatred, but that King David reacted no less towards God’s haters than towards his own enemies. This shows the level of King David’s values. He defended God as himself. But for lesser sins, hatred is not warranted. Everyone sins, and as we wish forgiveness for our sins, we should afford others the same lenience.

Moshe’s Fear

READER: In preparation for the battle against Og, God tells Moshe not to be afraid. What is it about this battle and not any other task that only here, God tells Moshe not to be afraid? What do we learn from it? How was Og alive from the time of Abraham until Moshe?

*Thanks and regards,
Saul S. Aptekar
India*

RABBI: Longevity back then extended to 1000 years...literally. Rashi answers your question: Moshe feared Og had earned merit by assisting Abraham. He feared that merit would shield him from Moshe’s attack, placing the Jews in danger.

Predetermination & Free Will

READER: My question is about predetermination. I have personally never believed in it; it seems to contradict free will. I have heard many lectures from rabbis which teach this concept. Does everything that happens to us, happen for the good and is predetermined by Hashem? I believe every one is responsible for their own actions and is not the “messenger of Hashem,” [meaning we aren’t coerced to harm others who sinned as a punishment from God]. In some cases

however I believe when we are hurt by someone, it’s because Hashem removes his protection from us when we are sinful or act against His Torah. What are the rabbis’ opinions about predetermination?

*Thank you,
Mark Stanley Gomez
Vetturimadam, India*

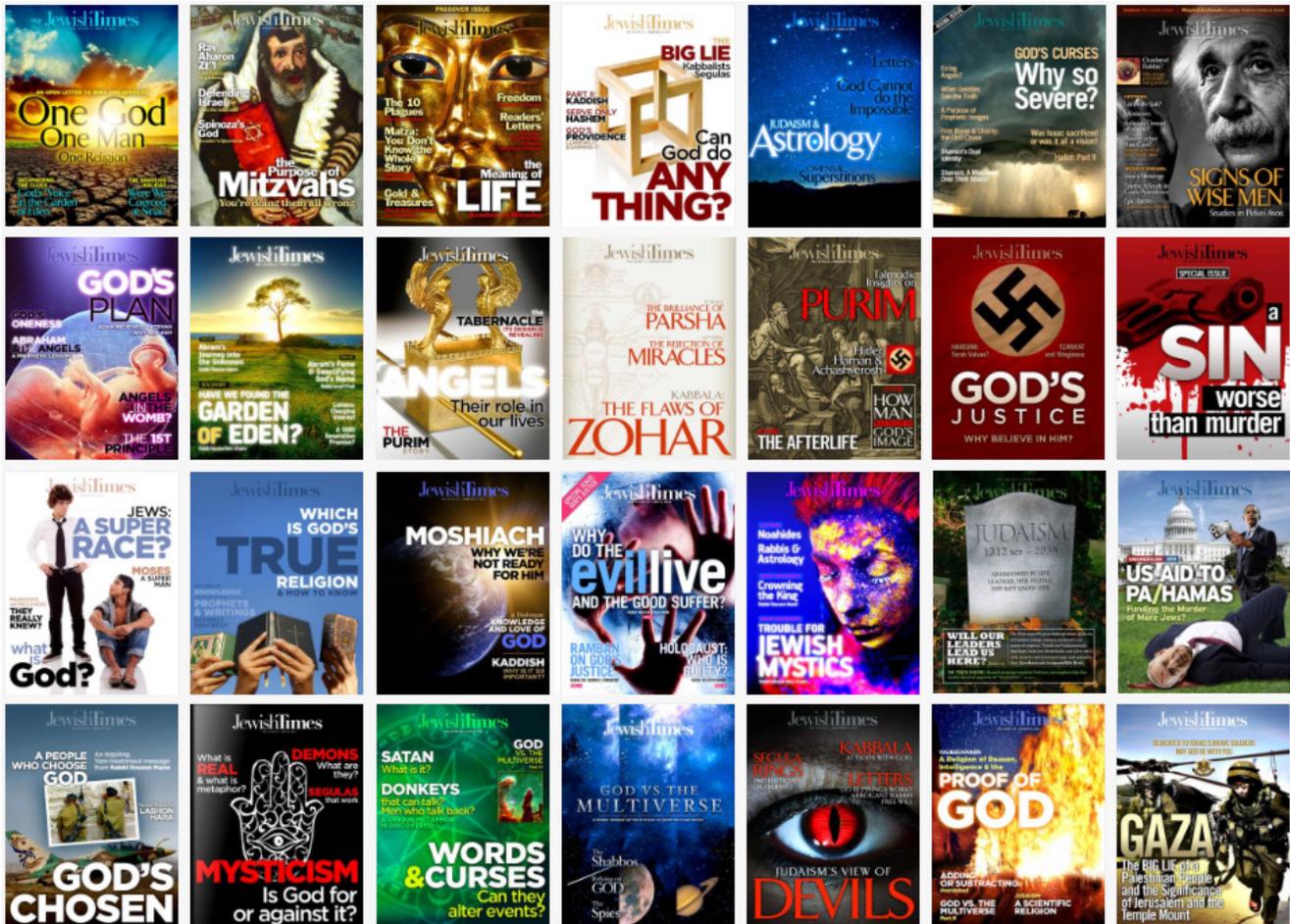
RABBI: The rabbis agree: “And Rabbi Hanina said: Everything is in the hands of Heaven, except for fear of Heaven.” Man has free will to serve God, as it is stated, “And now Israel, what does the Lord your God ask of you other than to fear the Lord your God, to walk in all of His ways, to love Him and to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul” (Deuteronomy 10:12). The Lord asks man to perform these matters because ultimately, the choice is in his hands. And when evil occurs, most of the time it is self-inflicted (Maimonides). But regarding evil inflicted from others or nature, God can protect one if he is worthy. However, Torah does say that God will use one person to bring justice to another, but this does not mean free will is suspended. Rashi comments o Exodus 21:13:

Two men, one of whom killed a person with premeditation and the other killed inadvertently, and in neither case were there any witnesses to the deed who could testify about it. Consequently, the former was not put to death and the latter was not forced into banishment to a city of refuge. Now God brings them together at the same inn. He who killed with premeditation happens to sit beneath a ladder, and the other who killed inadvertently ascends the ladder and falls upon the man who killed with premeditation and kills him. Witnesses now being present testify against him, compelling him to be banished to one of the cities of refuge. The result is that he who killed inadvertently is actually banished and he who killed with premeditation actually suffers death.

But this does not mean in every case God has orchestrated what happens to us. Maimonides teaches this all depends on our level of deserving God’s providence. Sforno too says (Lev. 13:47) that most people—Jew and gentile alike—are not on the level of providence and are left up to chance like animals. ■

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JewishTimes



FROM THE FIRE

In this parsha, Moshe repeats 8 times that God's voice "emanated from fire." Organisms are found in every other element, from subzero climates, to ice, water and to soil. Fire is the single element in which no biological organism survives. God proved beyond any doubt that He is not a physical existence and clearly controls all that is. Speaking Torah from inside fire, God proves that, "The Creator is the Law Giver." The purpose of Earth is Torah. ■

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We Are Still Here

RABBI REUVEN MANN

On Tisha B'Av, which we have just observed, we recounted all the historical sufferings of the Jewish people.

To those of us who were born and raised in America, all of this is foreign to our experience. In the long history of the Exile, no Jewish community has had it as good as we have. America is a noble country that absolutely respects and preserves the right of all its citizens, regardless of race or religion, to live in peace and security. We should never forget or cease being grateful for this.

However, the Kinnot (lamentations) we recited should be a reminder that anti-Semitism is not a superficial or ephemeral phenomenon. It is deeply ingrained in the human psyche. The Rabbis say that the hatred of Esav for Yaakov is a "halacha," that is, a part of the natural order.

Virtually all of the civilizations with whom we have interacted became an enemy, at some point. One need look no further than the Jews of Germany. At one time, they were fully integrated and assimilated into the culture and society. We know where that story ended. This invariably leads to the question: Can it happen here? It doesn't seem or feel like it can, but our historical experience rules out the feasibility of confidently maintaining that it cannot.

In considering our history, one gets the impression that we have always been a small and weak people in comparison with the mighty nations that oppressed us. However, we should ask, Where are they now? All the great empires that arose to destroy us have been relegated to the dustbins of history, never to be heard from again.

And we, the despised people, who were dispersed to the ends of the earth and relegated to a state of abject defenselessness, are still here. Not only that, but we are a vibrant nation with achievements in science,



medicine, and technology way out of proportion to our numbers. This in addition to voluminous works on ethics, morality and Torah interpretation which have impacted and illuminated the path of all mankind.

Our enemies have misinterpreted the real significance of Jewish suffering. Rabbi Soloveitchik (the Rav) teaches that a major theme of the Kinnot is Christianity's theological gloating about the plight of the Jewish people. They have always said that we suffer because we have been displaced (by them) as G-d's chosen people.

This idea is expressed in a number of places, particularly in Kinna 20. There we read, "Incline your ear, my G-d, to the disparagement and ridicule, 'Where is your hope? Your Temple will never be rebuilt!' Incline your ear, my G-d, to those who claim that the Temple is abandoned, forgotten and cast aside, forever will it be desolate."

According to the great Rav, this refers to the Christian claim that G-d broke His Covenant with the Jews and permanently exiled them

from the land of Israel. Therefore, they say, the Jews will never be able to return and rebuild Israel and the Temple.

Much of Christianity posits the doctrine of "supersession," which asserts that Hashem broke His ties with the Jews and made a "new" covenant with the Christians. This idea was central to the historical dispute between the two religions.

We have always maintained that we are, eternally, Hashem's Chosen People. We have always asserted that our exile is temporary and that we would, ultimately, be restored to our Holy Land.

Most theological debates are of the kind that cannot be resolved by empirical evidence. This one proved to be the exception. The dream of the Return has become a reality. The Jews have rebuilt the land of Israel into a vibrant and thriving society.

The Church took its time and was very reluctant to recognize the State of Israel. Israel's existence constitutes a theological challenge for which it has no answers. Israel

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is a thorn in the side and an absolute refutation of the claims of those who taunted, "Where is your hope? Your Temple will never be rebuilt!"

Therefore, as we emerge from the day in which we recounted the manifold tragedies of Jewish history, we should not lose sight of this amazing fact: the people who suffered these fatal blows, which would have brought down any other nation, are still here, alive and well.

Why is that? The answer is in this week's parsha, Va'etchanan. In it, Moshe refers to the Jews as a "great" nation. He says, "For who is a great nation to whom Hashem is close, in all of our calling out to Him? And who is a great nation that has laws and statutes that are righteous and just, as this entire Torah that I place before you this day?"

We are an eternal People because Hashem has associated His Name with us. Only to us did He entrust His Torah of truth so we would implement and preserve it. And only the nation that fulfills the Divine revelation, according to the written and oral law, can lay claim to being His Chosen People. It is exclusively because of Hashem's closeness to us that we have survived and outlived all our oppressors, who sensed our strange uniqueness and sought to destroy it.

In this season of Nachamu (consolation), we should be grateful for the Divine Providence that has enabled us to initiate the process of redemption by granting us a foothold in the Land of Israel. May we be inspired to grow in the ways of Divine wisdom and, thereby, merit to witness the time when the nations, upon recognizing our enlightened and inspired way of life, will proclaim, "What a wise and discerning nation is this great people."

Shabbat shalom. ■

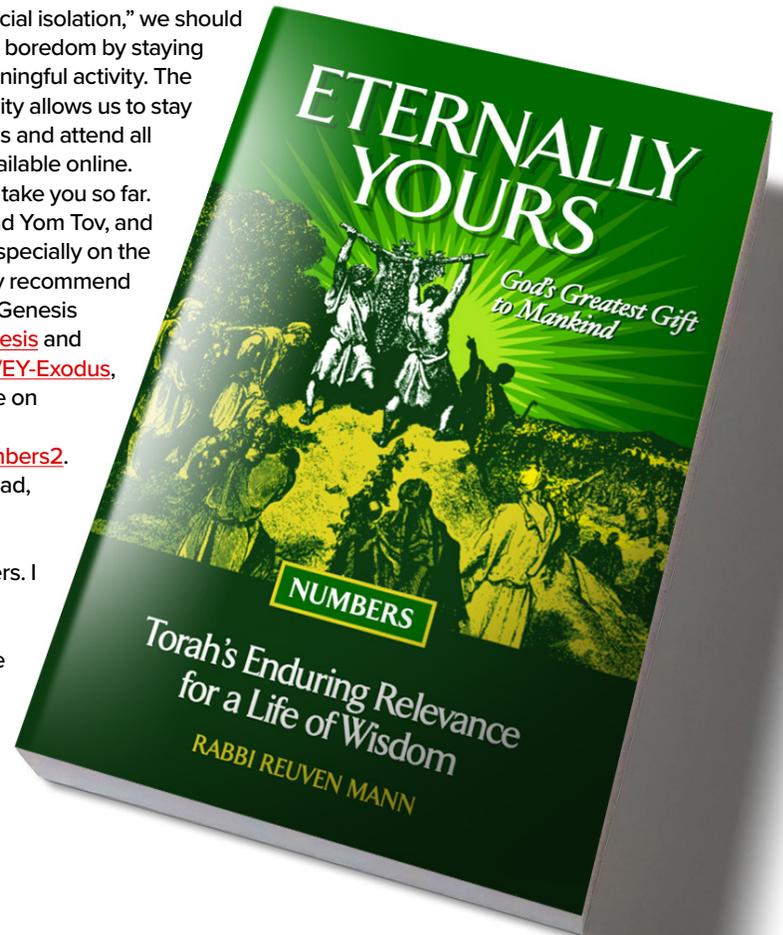
Dear Friends,

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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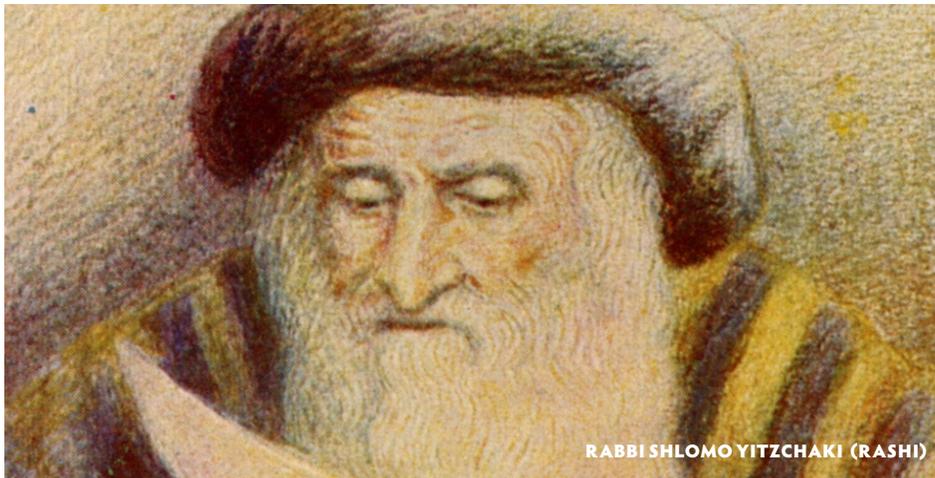
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Prior in Time: Prioritized in Value

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM



RABBI SHLOMO YITZCHAKI (RASHI)

Moses sought safe passage through Cheshbon en route to Israel. Deuteronomy 2:26 recalls Moses sending to Sichon king of Cheshbon a peaceful message from the “Wilderness of Kidaymos.” Rashi comments:

“From the Desert of Kidaymos”: [Moses said] “Even though God did not command me to call peacefully to Sichon, I learned from the Desert of Sinai, from the Torah that preceded (kidamta) the world. For when God came to give the Torah to the Jews [in Desert Sinai], He [first] approached Esav and Ishmael [that they accept Torah]. Despite knowing they would not accept it, God still entered a conversation with them peaceably. So too, I initiated (kadima) a peaceful entreaty to Sichon.”

Another explanation of “From the Desert of Kidaymos”: [Moses said] “From You [God] Who preceded (kidamta) the world, I learned. You could have consumed Egypt with a single bolt of lightning. Rather, in a gentler manner, you sent me from the desert to Pharaoh that he free the Jews.”

What is Moses’ message of “Kadima,” that the Torah and God “preceded” the world? Without the Torah and God “preceding” the world, Moshe could have understood from God’s actions alone with Esav and Ishmael, and with Pharaoh, that lenience is proper, and thus, Moses should be lenient with Sichon. But Moshe makes “Kadimos” essential, explaining why he referred to the desert by that name. What is the lesson of “Kadima,” of Torah and God preceding the world, and how does this guide Moses’ lenience with Sichon?

Moses understood a fundamental lesson: That which is prior, gives purpose for what is subsequent.

What is prior in time, is so as it is prior in importance. This lesson is so important, Moses referred to the desert by this euphemism. Let’s better grasp his message...

Air preceded the lung, thereby giving purpose to God’s creation of the lung: without air, a lung has no purpose, so the lung’s purpose is to oxygenate man’s body. Water preceded fish,

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giving purpose to God's creation of gills. Torah preceded man, giving purpose to man. Had God created man and then created Torah, this would imply that man has purpose independent of Torah, which is false. The rabbis teach "He gazed at the Torah and created the world." Meaning, Torah is the world's blueprint. All that God created was for man to approach God and His wisdom. Torah facilitates this. Rashi teaches (Avos 2:8) that without the Jew learning Torah, God would revert the world to chaos. Talmud Avoda Zara 5a mirrors this: "The Holy One, Blessed be He, established a condition with the acts of Creation, and He said: 'If the Jewish people accept the Torah at the revelation at Sinai, all is well and the world will continue to exist. But if they do not accept it, I will return you to the primordial state of chaos and disorder.'"

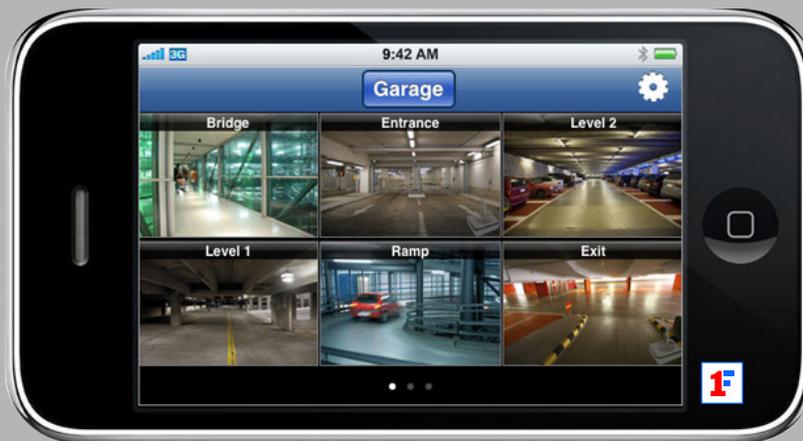
Earth exists with the single purpose of man discovering God and following His Torah. While Moses could have derived and taught God's ways through His acts alone towards Esav, Ishmael and Pharaoh, we would be missing the lesson that, "what is prior gives purpose." Moses referred to the "Wilderness of "Kidaymos; Desert of Priorities" as he felt this so important that man reflects on how God ordered His creation: God and Torah preceded the universe and man. This order is revealing. During his final days, Moses instructed the Jews that vital principles can be deduced from God's actions, that should forge our values and our actions. God's acts intend to teach man optimum values.

There were two eras: one before Torah and one after it. Rashi's first explanation above addresses the world after Torah existed. Moses taught the Jews that as Torah preceded the world, it is God's will is that man follow Torah, and therefore, "I treated Sichon in a manner to allow him to recognize Torah through the Jewish people." The second part of Rashi explains how even prior to Torah, Moses learned from God's "prior" existence that man who comes after God, exists only to recognize God. Thus, obliterating Pharaoh and Egypt is only a last recourse. Therefore, God applied patience and gave Pharaoh a chance to recognize Him. Despite God's foreknowledge that Pharaoh would not acquiesce, God's lesson was also for the world: "Nevertheless I have spared you for this purpose: in order to show you My power, and in order that My fame may resound throughout the world" (Exod. 9:16).

“Desert of Priorities” was not the desert’s name. Moses coined this name to teach that events in the desert offer great instruction: what came prior in time, is prior in importance.

Torah preceded the world, so Torah is man's purpose. And even before Torah was given, as God preceded the world, God is the purpose of the world. Even without Torah, Man is to observe how God operates. This fundamental lesson is that reality unfolded in an order, and this meaningful order teaches values which man must embody. ■

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