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Knowledge and Belief

RABBI ISRAEL CHAIT

We have shown in our last article that the notion of religious faith is not Biblical, that is, it is not found in the Jewish Bible the Torah. It is Christian, and on a larger scale belongs to the pagan, primitive, and idolatrous modes of worship which the Torah proscribes and abhors. The Torah demands knowledge not faith. Verses such as, "You have been shown so that you may know that the Lord, He is God; there is none other besides Him (Deut. 4:35)," and, "And you shall know this day and return (those ideas) to your heart that the Lord, He is God... (ibid:39)" make this clear. When Moses appointed the leaders of Israel he stated, "Get yourselves men of knowledge and depth of understanding who are known (as such) to your tribes... (ibid. 1:13)." Moses did not request "men of great piety and

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The Torah's Veracity

Following is a fictional dialogue between an inquirer "John" and Mesora. Based on actual discussions with many individuals inquiring on the benefits and reasons for becoming observant.

Part I - Proof that God Gave the Torah to the Jews at Mount Sinai

John: OK, let's start with the basics, there are many religions, why should I follow Judaism, or even any religion. What's wrong with me starting my own religion, or even better, why don't I just live a life without God?

Mesora: It's not a matter of right or wrong, it's a matter of true or false. You should follow what makes sense, as in all other areas of your life. I'm sure you selected your career and your children's teachers and school very carefully. Why not use the same reasoning when selecting a philosophy?

John: True, I should engage the same level of rational thinking I use in other areas when I approach decisions in philosophy. First, prove to me God exists. Forget the veracity of specific religions for now, just prove there is a God.

Mesora: The world accepts the fact that there was an event, at which over 2 million Jews witnessed supernatural feats, and at which an Intelligence delivered a system of ideas to them. This intelligence spoke from amidst a fiery mountain, communicated laws, and claimed responsibility for the 10 plagues visited upon the Egyptians, the exodus therefrom, and many miracles which none present then denied their miraculous nature. The very same people, the Israelites, who saw these miraculous plagues in Egypt and who were spared the suffering of those miraculous plagues, now attested to a miraculous event at Mt. Sinai. They all admitted to hearing a voice delivering commands, a voice which they felt if listened to would kill them. They admitted to seeing the mountain burning with fire, a feat not capable of being duplicated by man. They admitted to hearing this voice emanate from the fire, an impossibility for any biological creature to perform - an Intelligence unaffected by the laws of nature.

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Color retouched to portray Tablets in their realistic sapphire. (Original: Samuel Bak)

ASK YOUR CHILDREN:

"Why did Moshe break the tablets only after he saw the Golden Calf?"
Have your children email us with their answers, or asking for ours.

Questions & Answers

E-mail us: questions@mesora.org

Question: On your website you post a number of very worthy shittos from the Rishonim and other baalei mesorah concerning the impossibility of man having "powers" in the supernatural domain. While I realize that we must follow the Rambam, and his son Rav Avraham, in understanding midrashim and aggados which are contrary to logic and rationalism in a homiletical or non-literal way, still, I would pose the following question:

In Melachim Aleph, Eliyahu stands before Ach'av and utters a curse against the Northern Kingdom: "There will be no rain in the days to come, except through my word (ki im lefi devari)." The Gemara in Sanhedrin records an unwritten account to the juxtaposition of Eliyahu's curse with the previous episode of the fulfillment of Joshua's curse of the man who builds up Yericho (his firstborn and youngest will die -- as happened to Chiel). Basically, Eliyahu's curse is in response to Ach'av's allegation that Moshe's curse of "Ve'atzar es hashamayim v'lo yihye mattar," did not come to pass, while Joshua's did -- thus, Elijah fulfilled the curse. How was he able to? Well, earlier, the Gemara stated that Elijah did not want to go comfort Chiel (since

Ach'av would be there, and would curse Hashem), but Hashem persuaded him by telling him that whatever curse he uttered, He would fulfill.

Now, simply taking this story at face value, do we not get the impression that Elijah was given CONTROL of the elements. Even though this power originated with G-d, still, wasn't it his own power? A response is greatly desired.

Mesora: It cannot be Eliyahu's own powers for good reason: The world was working under the created laws prior to Eliyahu's birth. So 'Someone' other than Eliyahu is responsible for their operation and aberration - God. So if it is God, it is not Eliyahu or any other being. Additionally I would ask, "Can a chair created by a carpenter control the carpenter? Did not the carpenter give existence to the chair, thereby showing clearly that the chair is the controlled, not the controller?" So too is the case with Elisha and God.

Tosfos in Niddah 16b says that a few keys are in God's hands, but are handed over to a messenger temporarily, for the need of the hour; the key of life, the key of rain and that of resurrection, as witnessed in Elisha. What does this Tosfos mean?

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Knowledge and Belief

RABBI ISRAEL CHAIT

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religiosity," rather, men of "knowledge and depth of understanding." Ever since the time of Moses the religion of Israel has been guided and directed by the scholars of Israel, the great intellectual giants of the nation. The religion of Israel is not democratic nor is it prejudicial. It is not democratic in that it does not permit the ignorant to voice an opinion on religious matters; he who cannot follow the complex and abstract arguments of the Talmud has no right to arrive at decisions in religious matters. On the other hand the religion of Israel is not prejudicial; it recognizes and reveres anyone who has the knowledge of Torah, young or old, male or female, black or white, proselyte or prince, a high priest or an illegitimate offspring. The religion of Israel is best described as an intellectual aristocracy; it centers around knowledge.

This being the case we may ask "is there any place in Judaism for something other than knowledge?" We may also ask "what is the difference between 'emunah,' (roughly translated as belief) and 'yediah,' (knowledge)?" Also, what is meant by the verse in Genesis 15:6, roughly translated, "And he (Abraham) believed in God and He counted it to him for righteousness?"

Let us examine the chapter in which the above verse is found. Here we find Abraham in a prophetic vision discussing with God the future prospects of his holy work. His main concern was that he was childless. This is expressed in Genesis 15:2,3. Abraham was convinced that in order for his work to continue after his death the successor to his position would have to be his own offspring. Eliezer, his faithful servant, would not have the kind of credibility necessary to continue the work successfully. God agreed with Abraham and promised him a successor from his own loins (verse 4). At this point Abraham inquires no further, as is stated in verse 6, "and he believed in God, and this was considered righteousness."

In verse 7 God continues to tell Abraham that his offspring will inherit the land in which he was then dwelling. Suddenly Abraham changes his tactic and he inquires of God, and here we must be accurate in our translation, "with what shall I know that I will inherit it?" It should be noted that he does not say "how" shall I know that I will inherit, but rather "with what" shall I know that I will inherit it. This

distinction, as we shall see, is of extreme importance. Every word in Torah counts.

Let us search out where the answer to Abraham's questions lies in the text. The semantics of the verse show us the way. Abraham asked "bamah aida," "with what shall I know;" God answered "yadoah taida," knowing you shall surely know (verse 13). Here we are dealing with knowledge, "yediah," not "emunah," belief or trust. Abraham's question was an intellectual one. God had promised him the land; this implied that a whole nation would one day be established that would follow his ideational system of knowledge of God. Abraham knew how difficult it was to get people to embrace the ideas of the true religion. After years of expounding his philosophy and in spite of the divine assistance Abraham received in making him a famous figure, he was only able to win over 318 people. Even his nephew Lot departed from him to obtain residence in Sodom. Abraham was intrigued by the sociological vision God presented to him. How could an entire nation be brought to embrace the true religion? He inquired of God, "bamah," with what, meaning, through what means can such a fact be accomplished? God answered him that it would take place through the medium of slavery (15:13). The slave, the lowly individual who has no status would listen to the ideas set forth by God's messenger, Moses, and then respond appropriately. It is paradoxical yet true that man is more prone to see truth precisely when he is in the lowest ebb of human existence. God taught Abraham this truth concerning the human personality and with it He explained how a nation would be founded with the ideas of the true religion.

Abraham never asked God "how do I know?" Such a question would be absurd, for "God is not a man that He should lie." (Numbers 23:14) Abraham never doubted the veracity of God's statement. But God is first and foremost for man, a teacher. In the prophetic vision man the student has the opportunity to gain knowledge from God the teacher. Abraham asked God an intellectual question "with what" or through what means can such a prophecy come into being? He was perplexed and intrigued by the sociological phenomenon God presented to him.

Similarly, when God told Abraham he would have a child, Abraham never asked God how He would bring this about. The particular details of how God would accomplish this were unimportant to Abraham. Interest in

such details is idle speculation and curiosity. In God's presence one does not seek idle speculation but instead one seeks knowledge. Abraham was praised for not asking God how He would bring about the birth of his offspring. Instead he trusted in God. He knew that how God does things, how He brings His plans into action, is not an area for human speculation. Here man should not attempt to use his reasoning powers. Here he must withdraw and trust totally in God. Here one uses "emunah," trust and belief in God's reliability to bring His word into actuality.

In these few verses the Torah narrative sets forth one of the basic principles of the religion of Israel. It teaches us when to use knowledge and when to abstain from using knowledge. Stated briefly, the eleventh principle of our faith, that is, the principle of God's system of reward and punishment, is not subject to human scrutiny. Nay, it is arrogant and preposterous for man to think he can understand God's plan; "for my thoughts are not your thoughts nor my ways your ways, saith the Lord." (Isaiah 55:8) Man can only state humbly, as did Moses, "and you shall know that the Lord your God He is God, the Almighty and the Trustworthy ("ne'eman" from the word "emunah") who keeps the covenant and the kindness to those who love Him." (Deut. 6:9,10) Our knowledge in this instance is limited to the fact the Almighty is trustworthy; we cannot have knowledge of the particulars of God's judgments. We must engage rigorously in knowledge of God's Torah even knowledge of His existence (for those who have risen to the level where they are capable of doing so) but we are never to think that we know God's plans.

Our father Abraham taught us this profound lesson and Moses and the prophets reiterated it. The Rabbis of the Talmud, the true heirs to Torah knowledge, have stated this in expounding the verse of Hosea 2:22, "And I will betroth thee with 'emunah,' trust." This, they said, refers to the trust the people of Israel have throughout the lengthy days of the Diaspora that the redemption spoken of by the prophets will come true. We do not know how or when this will happen but we know it will happen. As the angel said to Daniel, "because these things are closed and sealed till the time of the end." (Daniel 12:9)

There are always those that defy this teaching of Abraham. Instead of spending their lives in pursuit of knowledge of God's Torah they are preoccupied with God's plan. In every turn of current events they see the

specter of God's miraculous intervention which they believe will be carried out according to ideas that appeal to their infantile minds. Such are the groups of messianics who rise up again and again in every generation in a futile attempt to predict God's plans. They set up for themselves messianic figures, and when these fail they either set up others, or, refusing to accept reality, maintain that their proclaimed messiahs will return from the dead. They are usually outsiders who come to the religion of Israel with ideas they have absorbed from their pagan heritage. Sometimes they are even to be found among the people of Israel. This is stated in Daniel 11:14, "and the evil doers of your nation will rise up to establish the vision but they shall stumble."

The Rabbis have identified such groups as the "calculators of the end of time," and have stated unequivocally that "their spirit should decay." They attempt to find God not through knowledge but through their imagination. Since they search for God they feel close to Him but their method excludes them from having any part in the true religion of Israel. They are near to God in their mouths, but distant in their thoughts (Jeremiah 12:2). They have certain characteristics. They harbor a hatred for the scholars of Israel from whom they sense censure for their goals and motives. Their ideas of God are always tainted with the idolatrous which is the fullest expression of the seeking God through the imagination.

In summation, the word "emunah" has no counterpart in the English language. Words are representations of ideas; the ideas of Torah are unique and are often incapable of translation. We may interpret them through many words or phrases. The objective of Torah is to activate the divine element in man, which according to our scholars is the intellectual faculty. "Emmunah" is not a breach in the function of this faculty but rather a specific case. The same marvelous faculty which gives man knowledge also dictates to him that certain things are intrinsically unknowable. In "Emmunah" knowledge leads us to certain conclusions although we can have no first hand knowledge of the specifics of these conclusions. "Emmunah" is verification from an external source, indirect knowledge. There is no leap of faith in Judaism. We call God the God of "Emmunah" because although man can know that He is just he cannot know how He is just. Through "emunah" man reaches the highest plateau of self-knowledge, knowledge of his own limitations. ■

The Torah's Veracity

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The Jews and Moses attested to the fact that they received wisdom from He who his the controller of the laws of nature, the same being which performed the Egyptian exodus. No one then denied what they claimed their own eyes saw.

Today, the Jews, and many other nations admit that from this event we have demonstrative proof of an Intelligence which controls the laws of the world. We call this Intelligence God. Even scientists have come to the realization from the careful study of heavenly phenomena and laws, that there is a wise Designer of the universe. The heavens and all created matter did not create itself, hence, something external to the physical, created world caused our world's existence, and with such perfectly designed laws which govern it and actually sustain its integrity.

John: Well maybe they made up the story, or didn't grasp what really happened, and misconstrued the whole event.....

Mesora: Bottom line.....if any historically accepted account has as part of that story masses witnessing intelligible phenomena, the story must be true. You couldn't get them to lie unanimously, that's just not human nature for all the people there to have a common motive. You also won't have misinterpretation of what they saw and heard, provided it was understandable to an average intelligence. With this precise reasoning you would attest that Caesar was emperor of Rome. I'm sure you don't deny that, right?

John: Of course Caesar was the Roman emperor. Who could deny that? That's in all our history books, everyone knows that!

Mesora: Then the event at Sinai, where over 2,000,000 Jews witnessed God giving the Torah must also be true, based on your own reasoning. It's in all the bibles of the world. Even non Jews attest to its validity. The reason you might have a problem accepting Sinai, but no problem accepting Caesar, is that Sinai will obligate you in following the Torah's numerous commands. Believing in Caesar has no affect on your daily life.

John: Yeah, maybe. But why can't the story be made up by Moses then?

Mesora: If it was, don't you think the Jews back at his time would have said he was falsifying history? They wouldn't have accepted him. I mean, Moses would have to had convinced millions of people that they were all at an event which never occurred! There's no way the people would have accepted him, made him a leader, and unanimously followed him. That would be similar to me saying I was on the George Washington Bridge at rush hour, and the traffic was stopped, and said some spaceship descended and gave me some scroll in front of millions of spectators. Do you think one person would believe me if I couldn't produce those eyewitnesses? Even if I could get 10 or

12 people to go along with my story, I'd still go unbelievably, since my story said there were millions present.

John: So if any story is unanimously accepted it must be true? What about Jesus walking on water, or healing the sick? Millions of Christians believe that to be true!?

Mesora: You must distinguish between Sinai and all historical events, and from belief. Christianity does not proclaim that there were masses witnessing Jesus walking on water, healing the sick, or any other claim. They state that you must believe. So you either believe or not. But masses believing something is no proof to that belief. Masses also believe in UFOs. Sinai however is based on historical evidence, not belief. It is based on the exact same principles of proof which any historical account uses. It is impossible that a false story would be accepted unless it is bereft of witnesses and claims simple belief. If however a story is in our possession claiming mass witnesses, it must be true, and certainly if it claimed miracles as a component of that story.

John: OK, so Sinai was true. It happened. But I'm not clear on the others, what about all those other religions, I mean, they have millions more followers than the Jews?

Mesora: Yes. But their story does not claim masses of witnesses. They purport there were some witnesses, but conspiracy is possible with small numbers. Keep in mind, they have millions of followers, but not millions of witnesses. They don't even have dozens of witnesses!

John: So again, tell me how do they have millions of followers....

Mesora: Because of two factors, 1) they offer people who follow their notions a feeling of emotional satisfaction. Some absolve you of all sin if you believe, a very strong attraction, and some offer eternal bliss if you believe. Secondly, they base their religions on belief. No proof is required. Belief is something anyone can have, even a fool. So masses of unlearned people can flock to following these religions. None offer proof of their religion's validity, it's all based on faith.

So those religions have two factors, 1) An open door for any person to partake, since no proof is required, and 2) a motive for everyone to follow, as they offer grand 'rewards' for believers.

John: But you're saying Judaism doesn't require faith?

Mesora: That is correct.

Now that we have proved that the event at Sinai could not have been fabricated, we apply this very same scientific argument to the rest of the Torah. Had the people denied witnessing anything, Sinai would not have been circulated as truth, and it would not have been passed down through the generations as historically accurate. However, we find in the Torah many passages where Moses urged the people to remember what their eyes saw (Exodus 19:4, Deuteronomy 4:3,9,34,35, and 36.). Had they not seen the event, Moses's

story would not have survived the scrutiny of that generation, and the story would have died there and then. But this didn't happen, teaching us with certain proof that they all agreed that what Moses said was what they actually witnessed. The story teaches us that Judaism is built on proof alone. The only role faith plays in Judaism is that God will fulfill His words written therein. But in terms of acknowledging God's existence, and the veracity of the event of Sinai, we have demonstrated by proof that it is historically true.

Part II - Reasoning for Following the Torah's Ideals

John: Now that you've proven that God gave the Torah, what proof do you have that it makes sense for me to follow it?

Mesora: There are a few forms of reasoning which we can apply here. One would be from your own experience, the other would be an integral demonstration of how the Torah is of benefit.

In your own life, you entrust yourself to doctors for prescriptions and surgeries, is that correct?

John: Yes, who better, they understand the body better than anyone else.

Mesora: Right. So you entrust your very life to those who you feel know the body best. Using this same reasoning, if God designed the body, the mind and psyche of man, you would most certainly have to agree to follow His advice, as He didn't merely study the human species as a doctor does, but God surpasses any doctor's knowledge, as God created man. The Creator having more knowledge than the student.

John: I can't argue.

Mesora: Now, this God gave us the Torah as a prescription for the best life we can have. We therefore see it as absurd not to follow what the One who designed us said would make us happiest. He knows best.

John: Again, sound reasoning. But what if I find some idea in the Torah that my mind tells me makes no sense, do I simply follow it, and go against my mind?

Mesora: That's a good question. The answer would be no. I say this as God gave us a mind through which we are to arrive at decisions which guide our lives. He therefore designed us in a way to make decisions based on rational thinking. Just as we wouldn't inject ourselves with poison, we should not do any other act which we view as going against our benefit. But if God gave us the Torah with the goal of it being for our good, do you think you will find anything in it to our detriment?

John: I don't know, I haven't studied it yet. I'm just asking. I hear what you are saying, but I only know that God gave the Torah. I have no concept whether it is a good system or not.

Mesora: So you feel that God could have given a bad system?

John: It could be.

Mesora: So what do you propose to do to

answer your question?

John: Well, I obviously can study it or I can just continue my life as I have been living.

Mesora: But you already admit that God gave the Torah as a means for man's ultimate happiness. Why not investigate it for yourself?

John: Honestly, I've tried it, but its not enjoyable.

Mesora: It may take a some time to reach a level of enjoyment - you may not see it as pleasurable at first. This is only because your energies are used to physical pleasures, and the pain you will perceive is not because learning is painful, but because the extraction from any area is enjoined with some frustration. When energies have to be withdrawn from an area which one is accustomed to, until they find a new outlet, one experiences frustration. This is a very important idea. One must not accuse learning of being painful. He must identify the pain as merely the "getting used to" portion of learning. Additionally, when compared to other more popular instant gratifying types of activities, one may identify learning as painful, but if one has patience, and applies himself, he will come to see the pursuit of knowledge as incomparable to any other act.

Once you begin to excel in learning, you will not experience the frustration any longer, but you will be occupied with pondering very interesting areas. The involvement in the ideas will be something you will enjoy on a regular basis. The never-ending search for wisdom was the pursuit of the wisest men. They labored in their studies joyfully, and without end. Read any biography on Einstein, Freud, the Rabbis, and you will find that their interest was solely for learning. They were bothered by problems, and searched for answers many times without sleep. Why such a life of devotion? Because they enjoyed thinking into ideas. It satisfied their beings with an intensity unmatched by any other pursuit. They lived in line with the true nature of man. This 'being in line with your nature' is happiness, and proves that it is a good. The involvement of the Rabbis in Torah study proves that Torah is a good system, to answer your question. And, as man's essential nature is not the physical, but the intellectual, these men were essentially happy. Men however, who follow their accidental natures, the physical desires, will only be accidentally and temporarily happy. They will never experience true essential happiness.

My suggestion for you is to keep in mind what you have just learned, that is the proof that God gave the Torah to man, a system through which one can have the most beneficial and pleasant life. The system was designed by the same Being Who designed man. He therefore knows best what man should occupy his time with.

Give yourself a little time, locate a trained teacher, and set up regular intervals during each day to study with him. Let's talk more soon. ■

Olam Haba

RABBI REUVEN MANN

Question: I was learning the Ramban about Olam Haba, and I have a couple of questions. I was hoping that you could help.

In learning your tape on this subject, you said that since the Ramban says that we will return to the state of Adam HaRishon, that means that our mind will naturally dominate over our instincts.

How does this work with the other parts of the Ramban's explanation.

In Devarim Chapter 30 Pasuk 6, the Ramban says "the heart will not desire the improper and it will have no craving whatever for it." "This is a reference to the annulment of the evil instincts..." "..." for in the days of the Messiah there will be no evil desire in man, but he will naturally perform the proper deeds and therefore there will be neither merit nor guilt in them, for merit and guilt are dependent upon desire."

If there are no instincts, how are we similar to Adam? In that state, will we still sin? Thanks for your help.

Response: You ask a good question. I would say that the Ramban holds that Olam Haba is analogous to the state of Adam, however it is not identical in every respect. For it is clear that Adam had bechira (free will) and was therefore given commandments for whose violation he was punished. However he was different than we are in the structure of his yetzer hara (Y.H.) which was m'bechutz i.e. required external stimulation. For the natural flow of his instinctual energy was toward truth. In terms of his natural state i.e. absent any external stimulus one could say he lacked a Y.H. Thus the Ramban uses that state as the analogy to provide a model for Olam Haba. However it need not mean that Olam Haba is identical to Gan Eden in every particular. In Olam Haba the structure of his soul will be such that he will not be subject to a desire for evil even regarding those things which are external. His energies will be such that his love of truth will always be superior to any physical desire. In general this was the state of Adam in Gan Eden, and the Ramban refers to this only by way of analogy.

In summation: Adam's natural energies were in line with the good but he had within him the potential for an emotional attraction which would be powerful enough to overcome his reason. Thus Adam can be summarized as a natural state of good with possibility of sin (ie. if external stimulus

occurs which attracts sufficient energy to create a conflict between reason and emotion) Olam Haba is analogous to G.E only re. the first idea. However it is different re. the 2nd because the possibility of a conflict in which emotion will contain the potential to overpower reason will not exist.

Question: I assume that sin would then be impossible in Olam Haba. Will this change the system of Mitzvos? Will we still have Yom Kippur?

Response: It would seem that since there will be no sin there will be no reward and punishment, hence there will be no need to repent and hence no Yom Kippur. Bear in mind that the key point is that the Ramban identifies Yemos Hamashiach with Olam Haba which means the perfected State of the soul--the ultimate reward. Thus everything which we posit about Olam Haba i.e. "The world that is koolo Aruch, the world that is koolo tov etc means that it will be qualitatively different than the world we are in now. The Ramban accepts all the statements about Olam Haba which indicate that it is a state of absolute good with no evil. The only difference is that he maintains it will take place in the physical universe and man will have a physical form. However, he will be a perfected being, not subject to conflict, and incapable of sin. As such, there will be no need for Torah and mitzvos which were given to man in his imperfect state as a means of perfecting him and bringing him to his perfected state. Once in that state there is no longer any need for the system which brought him to perfection. (Once you are on the moon do you need the space ship which got you there? ie. if you have no intention of returning to Earth.) □

Can Man Perform Miracles?

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

(continued from page 1)

Notice that it calls the person who receives these keys a "messenger". This means that God's will is for the miracle to occur even before man wills it, and man is merely a messenger. God only incorporates a person into His plans and he acts as a messenger. This teaches us a very important idea, that if God does not will the miracle to occur, man cannot override God.

This also teaches that God is only allowing man to indicate when such laws will be suspended. Man cannot cause it.

Why does God do so? Perhaps to

emphasize the messenger's greatness. By God making it seem that he is "reacting" to man's word, it reflects great perfection of the messenger, as he talks, and God enacts.

Perhaps for this very reason God willed that Moses tell Pharaoh when the miracles would occur, thereby teaching the unique greatness of Moses to both the Jews and Egyptians. The Rabbis teach, "A tzaddik decrees and God fulfills". It means to endorse the tzaddik, not that the tzaddik has the ability to alter nature himself without God. One as perfected intellectually as a tzaddik functions in line with God's will, to such a degree, that the tzaddik's will reflects God's will. So it is as if, "he decrees and God fulfills".

Man didn't create the laws. He therefore cannot control them. □

Imprisoned

RIVKA OLENICK

Chazal say: "A person who is imprisoned cannot obtain his own release." Chazal could have simply said: "One imprisoned cannot escape." "A person who is imprisoned" is someone who cannot escape his/her own character faults. Like a person who cannot escape his/her own self. Although a person may be well aware of his/her character faults, it's easier to ignore them and "just keep going." This way of thinking is silly. Denial doesn't work, and ignoring our faults will not make them go away. And since these faults do not go away, a person becomes imprisoned by them. A person can recognize his/her faults but tries to correct these faults without asking for guidance. Chazal say that this course of action is doomed to failure. A person often makes the mistake of thinking that they "know better" when it concerns their own personality. So, one instantly rationalizes his/her faults and immediately legitimizes them. After all, "This is who I am. This is part of my personality!" And because of this faulty thinking he/she cannot be objective. So a trap is set for him/herself by him/herself. Yet even at this point a person will not seek an outside authority.

The Rambam says: "A person who purposely does not seek a wise and trustworthy authority is itself a moral fault." In this context "purposely" means free choice. "Cannot obtain his own release" is one who does not seek. He/she cannot obtain release due to his/her choice not to. Judaism says that one does have free choice and can utilize it. However, if one

chooses not to, one cannot possibly obtain one's own release. Therefore, the person remains imprisoned. In Proverbs 1:7, King Solomon said: "Fools scorn (despise) wisdom and correction." Rashi adds that before one acquires wisdom, one must have the fear of God. Otherwise one will have no desire to acquire wisdom, for fools who do not fear God despise wisdom. So, if a person were to have fear of God they would want to be free to serve God, not entrapped by denial.

In the Shemoneh Perakim, Chapter 8 the Rambam says: "A man should not say that his faults and shortcomings are already ingrained in his character and cannot be removed. For in every situation a person has the choice of changing from good to bad, and from bad to good. The choice is in his hands. This is the basis of all our statements with regard to the fulfillment of God's will or the rebellion against it. It is proper that one eagerly seek to acquire virtues, for there is no external force that will arouse one to them." In this context "eagerly seek" means using free choice. "Cannot obtain his own release" is one who does not eagerly seek. The lesson communicated by the teaching of Hillel states: "If I am not for myself, who will be for me?" Hillel also says that a person should say: "If I will not be the one who rouses me to virtue, who else will arouse me?" As the Rambam said before: "one should eagerly" seek to acquire virtues as there are no outside motivators - only the person him/herself.

People find it very easy to judge other people's character flaws. However, we are all obligated to first look into ourselves and work on ourselves. Every person must look carefully at their own character, see what is faulty and ask for help to change these faults. By doing this we are involved in our own perfection, which begins when a person recognizes their flaws and starts to make small changes in their personality. Wouldn't a person want to break free from being imprisoned by his/her character faults? "Oh, I can't change - I've been this way all my life." Not according to the Rambam. "A man should not say his shortcomings and flaws are already ingrained in his personality." Wouldn't a person want to use the greatest asset given to a human being - free choice - to make the right changes in their personality, and be truly involved in perfection and service of God? □

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AN OPEN LETTER TO THE JEWISH COMMUNITY

GOD'S LAND WITHOUT GOD?

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

Moses taught the Jews upon their initial conquest of Israel that if one chooses a path devoid of Torah, it results in a poverty stricken life. This was exemplified by Mt. Ayval's barren state. If one chooses a Torah lifestyle, it results in all forms of wealth, as in Mt. Grizim's lush quality. Two goats are to be offered in the Temple each Yom Kippur. A Rabbi once explained that these goats represented two opposing lifestyles: One can follow a life dedicated to God, as one goat was slaughtered to His name, or a life devoid of God, destined to fatality. This was displayed by the scapegoat lead through a desert to its certain death over the cliffs of Azazel.

Observant Jews view Israel as the land given to us by God - a haven secure to following His laws. To the observant Jew, God is essential to our land's objective. God created the Earth and gave us Israel. The existence of the world and following the Torah are both God's will. There is no separation of temple and state.

The non-observant Jew sees Israel purely as nationalistic, similar to any people's land. God is not essential, as all decisions concerning the state are decided politically.

Both positions cannot be correct.

Just as Moses taught the example of two mountains, and as the priests taught with the two goats, now is the time to teach our people what path to select and why. The "why" is what is missing. The Torah did not see fit to institute an annual commandment to take place on these two mountain tops, our choice to follow any command must be based on an analysis of fact.

In all areas of life, regardless if we are observant or not, we act as rational as possible and make decisions based on reason and proof. Isn't this true? Isn't this why a person carefully

chooses the right school, which doctor to accept treatment from, and what business decisions to make.

Unfortunately, people are not rational when it comes to selecting an ideology. Observant Jews follow Torah either by understanding the proofs of God's existence, or without proofs. But not a single non-observant Jew has done the same. Each Jew owes it to him and herself to determine whether or not God exists, and whether He gave us Israel and the Torah. If we prove that God does exist, then we know he gave us Israel. We can now determine through His prophets' teachings how to live and to keep our land, and deal with our enemies.

Mordechai and Esther did not succumb, they followed the Torah even in the face of great danger. On Purim, God saved Mordechai, Esther, and the entire Jewish nation because they followed God's Torah ideals. We must do the same.

Mesora.org suggests that you who have learned the proofs of God's existence begin teaching this knowledge to any Jew who does not know these proofs. Give another Jew the opportunity to explore the tenets of Judaism.

We are responsible for one another.

If you are non-observant, ask yourself one question: "Am I following what is true or what is false? Does God exist or not?" If this question does not matter to you, there's nothing more to be said. If however, you honestly seek answers to these question, read on.

The contradiction any non-observant, Zionist Jew must face is: "Why do I desire Israel as my land?"

What makes us a nation? Our history is accurate, we received the land and our nationhood from God who communicated with Abraham. This same God gave us the Torah

for our own benefit.

To believe we have rights to Israel, with no obligation to follow the Torah, is a clear contradiction.

Just as we make decisions in other areas, using analytic and objective criteria, let us decide rationally regarding Torah observance. The Torah suggests a lifestyle that is most enjoyable and beneficial to man. A lifestyle that Moses and King Solomon chose for themselves.

Through thought and understanding they transmitted to Jews at that time the knowledge they wanted future generations to know. Wouldn't you like to actually KNOW whether our Torah is authentic? You owe it to yourself to finally prove it.

If one believes in God and desires the land He promised exclusively by the words of the Torah, it is truly a contradiction to ignore His commands. Resolve your contradiction.

Why is there so much tragedy today? God determines the fate of the Jewish nation based on our adherence to Torah. If we abandon Him, He abandons us. The Jewish people do not deserve God's land and His protection,...unless they follow God's Torah.

We do not rely on God's intervention alone, but in the intelligent combination of action, prayer, and Torah adherence as exemplified by Jacob when he was hunted by his twin brother. Today, we are missing the third.

"Israel, you will not retain God's land without God."

Prove to yourselves the truth, God exists, God gave the Torah for our benefit. Study and keep the Torah. Country of Israel, trust God. Run the country according to Torah laws. God is a better advisor than any human ruler. God alone will decide our outcome.

TAKE THE NEXT STEP:

READ "*The Torah's Veracity*" ON PAGE I OF THIS ISSUE,
AND THESE ARTICLES BELOW ON MESORA.ORG....WE WELCOME YOUR QUESTIONS.

WHY BE OBSERVANT	WHY ONE SHOULD LEARN TORAH
PROOF OF GOD FROM SINAI	WHY JUDAISM?
MAIMONIDES' 13 PRINCIPLES	PRAYER