

JewishTimes

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MAGIC

As we know God is the sole creator and the only power in the entire universe, can we accept Egypt's astrologers as knowing the future and performing wonders? Why then couldn't they point to Moses as the savior and kill him? Why couldn't they remove any of the plagues?

LETTERS

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

What was Really Heard at Sinai?

TURK HILL: In his Guide (2:33) Maimonides states that at Sinai "Moses alone was addressed by God and he told his fellow-men what he heard." Below are some more quotes by Maimonides:

"It is clear to me that what Moses experienced at the revelation on Mount Sinai was different from that which was experienced

by all the other Israelites, for Moses alone was addressed by God" (Ibid.).

"God spoke to Moses, and the people only heard the mighty sound, not distinct words. It is to the perception of this mighty sound that Scripture refers..." (ibid.).

"Again it is stated, "You heard a sound of

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words" (Deut. 4:12), and it is not said "You heard words"; and even where the hearing of the words is mentioned, only the perception of the sound is meant" (ibid.).

"It was only Moses that heard the words, and he reported them to the people" (ibid.).

"It must, however, be noticed that the people did not understand the voice in the same degree as Moses did" (ibid.).

Does "Moses alone was addressed by God," mean there was no national revelation?

What do you think he is trying to say here?

In addition, the rabbis claimed that "God said all of the words simultaneously." They heard a voice with all the words at once. Ibn Ezra mocks this view. If God said all the words at once the communication would have been garbled and not understandable. Did this affect how the ancient Israelites perceived the revelation?

RABBI: "You heard a sound of words" (Deut. 4:12) means the Jews did not hear words, sentences or commandments, but they heard only sounds without speech. However, the sounds they heard were unlike anything they heard before. The sounds were organized patterns never found in nature. When we hear wind howling, it does not form patterns of 1 gust, then 3, then 5, then 7...and then repeat 1, 3, 5, and 7 gusts. If we heard such gust patterns, we would be certain they are organized by some underlying "will," as natural winds are chaotic. Similarly, if we saw a lightning strike as 1 bolt, then 3 bolts then 5 bold then 7 bolts, and this repeated many times, again, we would be certain this lightning was ordered by some underlying designer, and certain that these are not natural lightning bolts. "You speak to us," they said to Moses, "and we will obey; but let not God speak to us, lest we die" (Exod. 20:16). From here we learn the people had no doubt that the sounds were supernatural in origin.



After the event Moses repeats to the people nine times that they should not forget that they "heard a voice emanating from the fire." He told him they heard a voice but saw no form. He impressed upon the people that they should not make any error: this intelligence voice cannot be of biological origin, because fire destroys all intelligent biological life. Therefore, the people understood this revelation was generated by God alone. When they subsequently received Torah from Moses, how did they know that Moses did not write it himself? This was proven by the miracle of Moses' face shining light beams. God would not create such a miracle for a charlatan. This miracle endorsed Moses as accurately representing God's communication.

Why didn't God communicate words to the people as He did with Moses? This could be due to Moses' supreme level of prophecy, which the people did

not attain, and were therefore unfit to receive. Regardless, God did see the need for the people to witness intelligent sounds emanating from fire. Another reason Moses alone prophetically heard the words, could be that if what the people heard was identical to what Moses heard, they would have no problem arguing with him on various commands: "We heard the same thing as you Moses and we have a different interpretation." Torah would thereby become fragmented. Therefore, through this method of Moses alone receiving Torah, the people remain eternally dependent upon his leadership, and this removed any potential confusion of God's words.

Regarding the meaning of "God said all of the words simultaneously" we can explain this metaphor to indicate that the entire corpus of Torah is interdependent upon all its parts. This explains why we are commanded not to alter Torah in anyway. It's one complete perfect system, as if stated in a single utterance.

TURK HILL: Thank you for your reply. I agree that the Israelites did not hear the commands. However, is it possible that Moses spoke with a very loud voice? Perhaps he used a megaphone and pretended to be speaking out of the fire?

RABBI: No one can talk and 2 million people can hear him; voice does not possess such audible capacity. No one can make a voice emanate from fire, for what ever is generating the voice from the fire would be immediately burned.

TURK HILL: Maimonides writes "Our eyes saw, and not a stranger's. Our ears heard, and not another's. There was fire, thunder, and lightning." All of these items are a part of natural phenomena. Is it possible that the Israelites only heard thunder and seen lightening and mistakenly thought that they heard the voice of God?

RABBI: As stated above, the Jews said "but let not God speak to us, lest we die." They did not refer to thunder, but to some sound they identified as unnatural, as God's voice. ■

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Does Afterlife Exist?

GORDON G.: I sure hope it's true that those who "passed" means only that they aren't here, but they are not gone.

RABBI: God commanded us to follow the Rabbis (Deut. 17:11). That's because He knew the Rabbis would accurately transmit and interpret Torah. And there's not a single Rabbi who denies the principle of reward and punishment, the greater part of that reward being the person's afterlife. Afterlife is unanimously accepted. So important is this principle, that it is one of the 13 Fundamentals we must believe in order that we too have the eternal life. Every prophet and every Rabbi knows to be true that there is an afterlife which is complete bliss. King David said that it is only because he knew about the afterlife that he was able to tolerate the many pains he suffered here.

In Tzidduk Hadin (accepting God's decree of death recited at funerals), one section says,

Whether man lives one year or a thousand years, of what benefit is it to him? It is as if he never existed. Blessed is the True Judge who kills and revives.

This means that if life is truly temporary, the duration is of no value, if it completely ends. In this case, one cannot say "at least he lived," because there is no "he" after death to benefit from those years. If there is no afterlife, once life ends, that life was as though never lived. Again, this is because in this case, the person no longer exists, and gained no benefit from having lived. This is a subtle point, but a true one. But Torah's philosophy is that a good person earns eternal existence, and only that which is eternal, is a value. This explains why Tzidduk Ha'din concludes with the affirmation "God kills and revives," i.e., there is an afterlife.

The principle here is fundamental, and that is that goodness equates with what is eternal. Meaning, what is not eternal has no value. Why is this so?

What exists, does so not on its own, but only due to God's will. If something endures, this means God wills it to endure, it means it is of value before God. "Whether man lives one year or a thousand years, of what benefit is it to him? It is as if he never existed" applies even during the evil person's life.

For as he will eventually expire, his current life does not possess eternity. His life is worthless. But if he chooses to obey God and earns eternity, then he has value.

You might ask that we see evil people throughout all time. Does this mean that evil has value before God? The answer is that what exists throughout time is free will; evil is what individuals select...individuals who are temporary. But free will, which is eternal, is a value before God.

Does Free Will Exist?

DANI ROTH: How can free will exist if the world is completely run by the laws of nature?

RABBI: How does nature affect free will?

DANI ROTH: Well I could say that every decision I make is just because of something that happened to me in the past, so it's not really free will.

RABBI: Therefore you must say that free will is something which can be engaged, despite influences or your emotions from previous situations. A person has the ability not to be affected by his past but to make decisions based solely on his mind. Free will means that you can separate the effect of your emotions and your history, and instead, follow your mind alone. But if a person were purely emotional, then you are correct: he just reacts based on his upbringing and his experiences without choice. But if a person uses his mind he can override the effects of his emotions and choose his decisions based on his mind alone.

DANI ROTH: So then I guess you'd that this operates outside of nature, because it's an effect without a cause.

RABBI: Exactly. A person who uses his mind is not following natural influences. This means that the person's mind can operate without influence from the emotions. That's exactly what God said to Kayin when he wanted to kill his brother Hevel: "You can rule over your emotions."

DANI ROTH: Ok, that makes sense. Thanks! ■

SCIENCE



is she alive?

SELF AWARE AI

R. MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

“Self-aware” refers to one faculty of free will. Free will is the capacity of uninfluenced determination. Therefore, suggesting animals are self-aware is false, since an animal’s instincts compel it’s every act; there is no other capacity of “self.” As seen in the extreme synchronism of fish schools’ movements, instincts are identical in all species’ members. They are akin to robots. Animals cannot deviate from their instincts. So, animal’s have no “will”: a herbivore will

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never hunt. Even within the act of eating, when an animal chooses something more tasty over another food item, this too are the instincts at work. People err when assuming the animal made a decision, as people are projecting onto the animal how they feel they would select their choice of food.

Humans can also function this way, following instinctual drives. In this capacity, such a person is acting as an animal; he does not use free will. Or, a human can choose to follow his mind (soul), where he makes decisions based on intellect and morality: to either eat, or give the food to a more needy person, for example. Humans can act without the influence of their pasts, or their emotions; the mind functions independent of all else. This is what God told Cain when bent on killing his brother Abel: "Sin couches at the door; its urge is toward you, yet you can be its master" (Gen. 4:7). God told Cain despite his emotions, he has the capacity to choose based on his mind. Only humans are self-aware and can choose not to follow instincts or any influence. Animals follow only instincts, as they have no other faculty to determine their actions.

While a computer can "mechanically" produce a conversation, the computer is merely a machine which does not function of its own free choice, it has no "self" or uninfluenced will...but follows inanimate mechanics: the conversation is 100% human design, and 0% computer will. Even machine learning follows the limited scope of human design. It is impossible for the computer to act otherwise, thereby rejecting the assumption that it has its own "will." Although with practically unlimited functionality as compared to an automobile, the computer is mechanically no different than an automobile: both function limited by its manufacturer's mechanical design. The difficulty people have, is that since a computer partakes in "dialogue," it creates an emotional facade that it is "talking"...as if it is self-aware. Machine learning is no different.

One might then ask how a human is any different from a computer, for as a human follows God's design, he cannot do anything other than God's will.

Man Uniqueness

When God created physical man, He also added a metaphysical element which animals and all other creations do not possess: "And God created man in His image; in the image of God He created them male and female" (Gen. 1:27). God did not create anything else in "His image," meaning with intellect...a self-aware soul. It is with this soul that man became similar to God in his self-awareness and free will self-determination. Thought is the one activity uninfluenced by anything else. Man's soul frees him from all other influences, enabling him to

be self-determining, like God. Even though God's will is that man is good, man has a free will to choose evil, and all choices.

Machine vs. Man

A soul is not physical, and man can only create things which are physical. Therefore, man cannot create a soul and implant it into a computer. Thus, the computer—no matter how advanced—never attains self-awareness. This is because self-awareness does not emanate from a physical entity, nor from its massive stored data or computational capacity. Computers will grow very smart with machine learning and will exceed our expectations, but they will not attain a metaphysical soul. The question then arises regarding human manufacturing of DNA, organ generation, and the creation of man. Do we say that a soul is a natural part of any human being, even when created artificially, and not through egg fertilization? Or will the human from manufactured DNA—should this ever occur—be purely instinctual, bereft of a soul, just as a computer is bereft of a soul? One could answer that as we see a soul can exist separate from the body in death, the soul will not be naturally attached to body (when man fabricates DNA and a human), but only through God's will, when man is created in a natural fashion of egg fertilization. Time will tell. ■



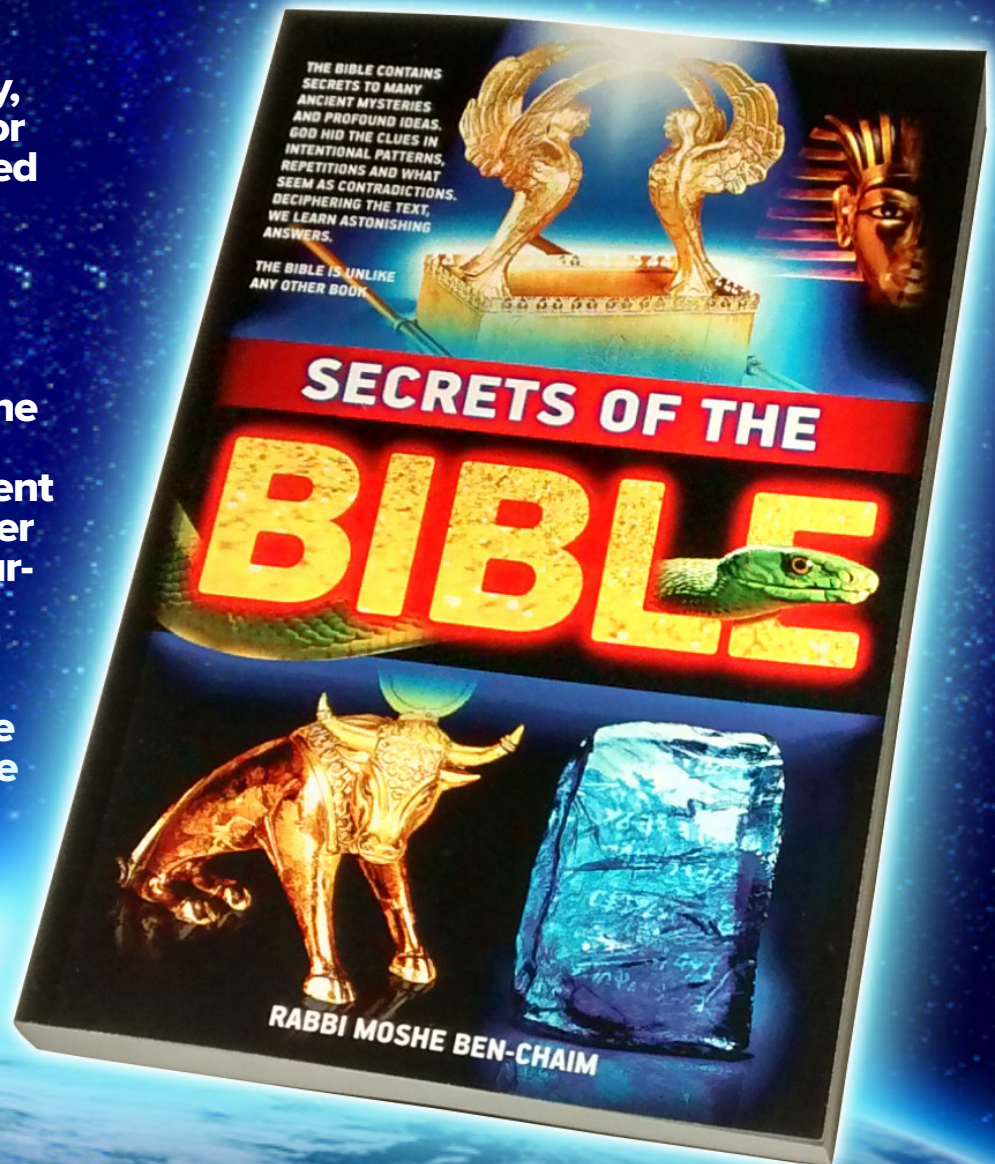
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METHOD

did Astrologers use Magic?

EGYPT

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

Pharaoh was threatened by the Jews' numbers; he feared they would join Egypt's enemies. Therefore he enslaved the Jews. Now that Pharaoh had the Jews under his control, what led Pharaoh further to murder Hebrew male newborns? Rashi says, "The astrologers saw a savior would be born to the Hebrews" (Exod. 1:16). Of course, the astrologers saw nothing as astrology is a baseless belief. I will soon prove they lied, but what compelled them to fabricate this claim? The answer is the same as why they attained posts as Pharaoh's astrologers: they desired a high political position. But to remain in power, one must continually display one's value. The astrologers could not be silent for too long, otherwise, Pharaoh would dispense with them. Therefore they needed to continue their charade conveying value to Pharaoh.

Playing on Pharaoh's original fear that the Jews would rebel, the astrologers cleverly fabricated "seeing in the stars" that a savior will be born, which heightened Pharaoh's fear of an uprising. Pharaoh—clearly insecure and a mystic—blindly accepted the astrologers' words. He felt through his imposed back-breaking labor, all adults were now of broken spirit, posing no threat to become a savior. Therefore, to avoid the future threat of a child maturing into a savior, he ordered the midwives to murder newborn males on the birthing stools. When the midwives refused, Pharaoh's hands were tied. He had wished to disguise the midwives' murder of the infants as a natural stillborn epidemic, which he felt would be accepted by the Jews. But after the midwives saved the infants, Pharaoh could not order them to openly kill the newborns, as the midwives said, "The Hebrew women are not like the Egyptian women: they are vigorous. Before the midwife can come to them, they have given birth" (Exod. 1:19). Pharaoh accepted the midwives' sentiment that once an infant was successfully delivered, a stillborn pandemic claim could no longer deceive the Hebrews. Pharaoh failed.

The astrologers once again found themselves pressed to sustain their value to Pharaoh. They

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saw Pharaoh bothered about the living infants. Therefore, they fabricated a new lie to show their value to Pharaoh:

For on the day when Moses was born, Pharaoh's astrologers said to him, "Today their deliverer has been born, but we know not whether he is born of an Egyptian father or of an Israelite; but we see by our astrological art that he will ultimately suffer misfortune through water" (Rashi, Exod. 1:22).

Based on this, Pharaoh now had the Egyptians drown all Egyptian and Hebrew newborns. The astrologers realized Pharaoh was disturbed by his inability to carry out his plan to kill all Hebrew newborns. They once again rose to secure their positions and offered Pharaoh a solution. They would provide an immediate solution to Pharaoh, as they could effectively kill the savior today. But why did the astrologers include in their fabricated forecast, the savior's death by water? This is because astrologers wished to placate Pharaoh that he was acting in line with a "higher force." Pharaoh's sense that he followed an astrological fate alleviated his fears of repercussion.

"But we know not whether he is born of an Egyptian father or of an Israelite"

Why did the lying astrologers not offer Pharaoh a clear message, but instead, claimed ignorance of the savior's nationality? The astrologers knew Pharaoh would consider the reality of an Egyptian sympathizer. Had the astrologers said the savior was a Hebrew alone, they knew Pharaoh would be troubled that they had not addressed the possibility of an Egyptian sympathizer. The astrologers wished to sustain their value which required Pharaoh's complete satisfaction with their forecast, and therefore said they were not sure if the savior was Egyptian or Hebrew.

Rashi Knew the Astrologers Lied

How can Rashi say, "On the day when Moses was born" Pharaoh's astrologers said to him today their savior has been born? Is Rashi agreeing that the astrologers knew the day when Moses was born?! The astrologers were not prophets, and astrology is false. How does Rashi say this?

Rashi (Exod. 2:3) says that Moses' mother Yocheved hid Moses from the Egyptians for 3 months after his birth. Now, had the astrologers been correct that they knew which day Moses was born, they would have stopped killing infants after Moses' birth date; as they had killed all infants born on that day, this included the savior. However, the fact that Yocheved hid Moses was because the astrologers had not yet told Pharaoh, "Today the saviors is born." Had they already told this to Pharaoh, the murder of infants would no longer continue, and Yocheved would not need to hide Moses. Thus, the astrologers lied when they told Pharaoh "The savior is born today." Yocheved hid Moses because the astrologers had not yet suggested the savior's birth date had arrived. Moses was born before the date the astrologers said that he was born. Rashi teaches that the astrologers lied.

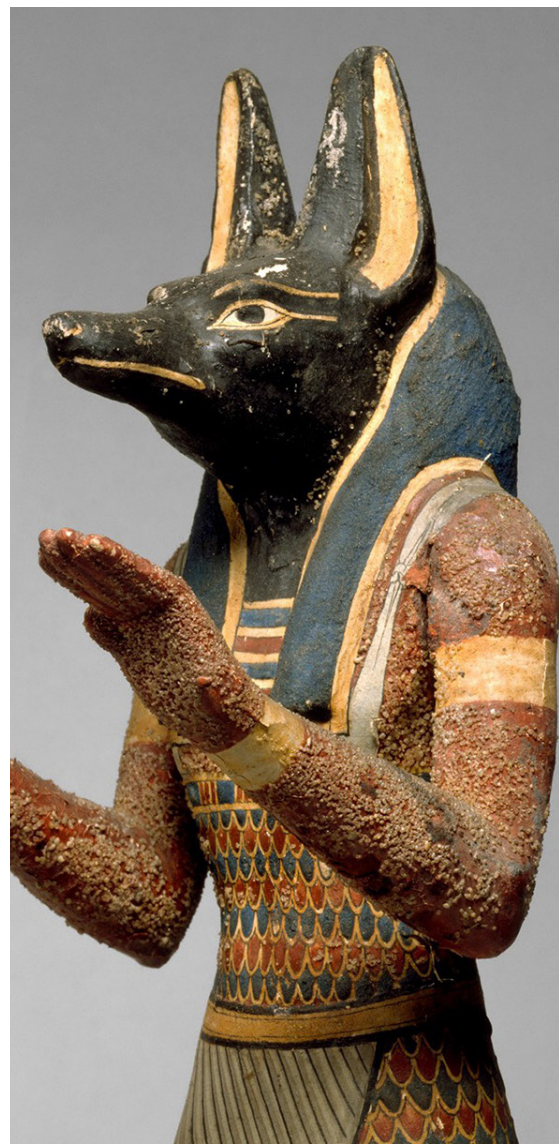
Finally, consider this: God planned Moses' birth and existence to carry out His will. Therefore, it is nonsensical to suggest that God shared Moses' birth date (via astrology) with those intent on murdering him. God did not allow the astrologers to know when Moses was born. The astrologers were liars.

Many Jews today still accept the validity of black magic, astrology, amulets, spirits, communicating with the dead, omens and all such idolatrous notions. Torah offers us the opportunity to discover the truths of God's creations, and how to determine what is false. In this case, Rashi provided us with insights that unveil the fallacy of astrology. We

must not believe unproven matters, such as these idolatrous practices and beliefs. Maimonides wrote:

Every reasonable man ought to distinguish in his mind and thought all the things that he accepts as trustworthy, and say: "This I accept as trustworthy because of [Torah] tradition, and this because of sense-perception, and this on grounds of reason." Anyone who accepts as true anything that is not of these 3 categories, of him it is said: "The simple believes everything" (Prov. 14:15).

Astrology and idolatrous practice fall under the category of matters undetected by the senses, alien to reason and outside the pale of Torah. They must be rejected as false. ■



God's Existence: Circular?

Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim

READER: Dear Rabbi, An atheist said that the concept of God is circular. One of the biggest proofs for God is the cosmological argument. The cosmological argument proves the existence of God by the fact that things exist. The universe must have a first cause (God). However, an atheist said this is circular. It is as if we were saying, "The universe exists, therefore we infer that a God exists, and conversely, God exists, therefore, the universe exists." Is this circular? A logical fallacy? Is the evidence for God's existence circular?

RABBI: The existence of the universe undoubtedly demands a Creator; such perfect design, synchronism and harmony cannot exist by chance. But God's existence—even if we say God's nature is to create a universe—forces no circular argument. These claims form not 1 circular interdependency, but there are 2 separate points here: 1) proof of God as deduced through the wisdom embedded in the universe, and 2) that God caused the universe. The first statement deduces "how" we know God exists, and the second

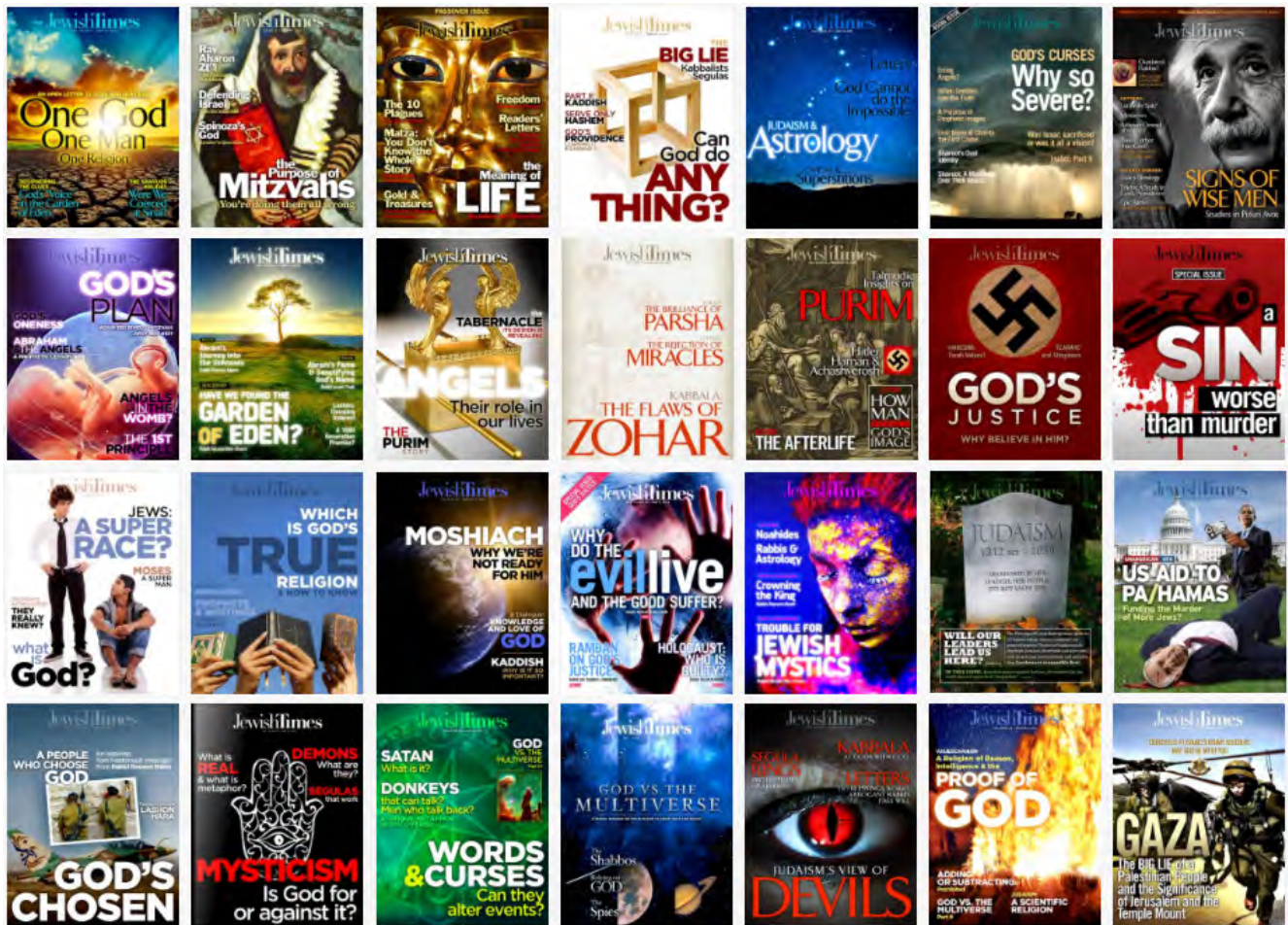
statement says God caused the universe, without any deductive claim. We are not saying the universe caused God, and God caused the universe. That's not circular, but a contradictory, for such a claim says both God and the universe preceded each other.

A circular argument would be, "God must exist, as He says so in His Bible." Here, one uses circular reasoning, as he claims God's Biblical existence is proved from that very book. Similarly, if one says, "This book is old because the book says so," one uses circular reasoning: he attempts to prove the book's age from the book itself. However, validation of X must come from Y, not from itself. Therefore we don't accept God based on Bible, but based on something external to Bible, i.e., the event of mass revelation transmitted through time. Human transmission is external to Bible; Bible merely records actual transmission. But from Bible itself there is no proof of its words. That's circular.

For this reason we reject all other religions, as they provide no transmission of events of divine revelation witnessed by masses. Their stories and claims lack the vital element of transmission by masses of attendees. ■

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“Partners” with God in Creation?

“Any judge who gives a rightful decision—as truth demands it—even though he spends but one hour on it, Scripture accounts it to him as though he had occupied himself with the Torah the whole day long, and as though he became partner with the Holy One, blessed be He, in the work of the Creation of which it is stated, “It was evening and it was morning” (Rashi, Exod 18:13).

The rabbis also say when a Jew recites “Vayichulu” — “The heaven and the earth were finished, and all their array” (Gen . 2:1) he too becomes a partner with God in Creation. But as Creation was complete, how can we subsequently partner in a concluded act?

These 2 matters address 2 areas: justice and creation. We partner with God not in the “act” of Creation, but in its “purpose.” Creation is purposeless without man

recognizing God as Creator, and also upholding His will through justice. Thus, by 1) judging truthfully, and 2) attesting to God as Creator when reciting Vayichulu, man gives creation purpose.

Man cannot partner with God in physical creation; it concluded long ago. But man can partner with God by giving creation purpose: in both enforcing justice, and spreading the truth of God is the sole creator. ■

NEW

Moses: the quintessential man of action. But in Deuteronomy he appears as a great thinker, teacher, elucidator of the Torah entrusted to him. Rabbi Mann expounds upon Moses' final addresses in words so sublime, God included them in the Bible.

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Rabbi Reuven Mann – Deuteronomy

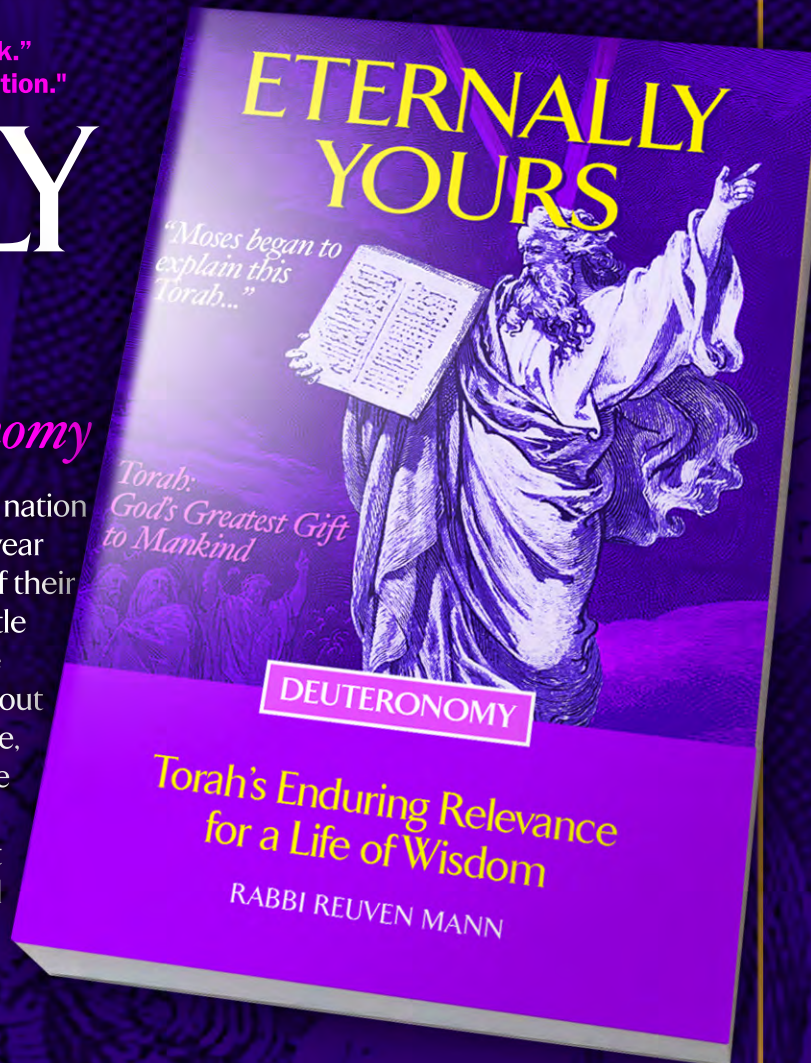
Devarim contains Moses' final communications to the nation he had led out of Egypt and guided through the forty-year ordeal in the Wilderness. The Jews were on the brink of their entry into the land which they would conquer and settle without him, their great leader. Moses' final talks to the Jews reveals his true greatness. He is not concerned about his own place in history; his only objective is to facilitate, to the best of his ability, the success of the nation in the land. He thus exhorts them to study, understand and fully implement the Torah which constitutes the surest guarantee of their longevity and well-being in the Land that God gave them so they would become a "Kingdom of Priests and a Holy Nation." This book focuses on those lessons.

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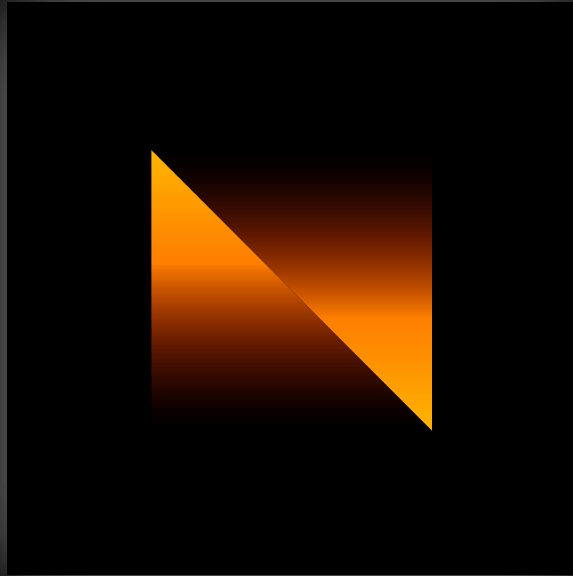
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Book Reviews

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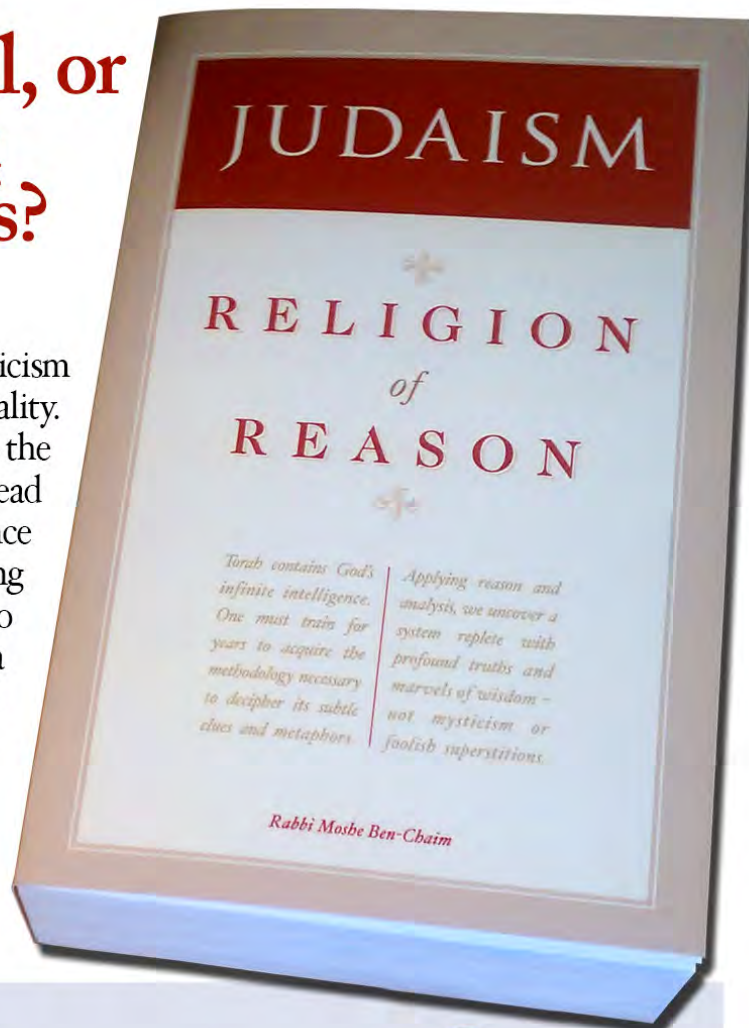
Rabbi Steven Weil — *CEO, Friends of the IDF*

Judaism: mystical, or rational based on reason and proofs?

by Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim

Jews have succumbed to mysticism and pop-kabballa, in place of rationality. Ten years in the making, the author cites the Rabbis, unveiling the fallacy of widespread beliefs. He focuses on Torah's brilliance and method of decryption; unraveling metaphors and interpreting texts to reveal hidden gems. Readers will enjoy a long overdue, rational exposé of cultural beliefs, and a unique look at Torah's deep insights.

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Rabbis' blessings
Can God do Anything?
Superstition
Astrology
Praying to the dead
Reincarnation
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Why the good suffer
Is God running my life?
Segulas & amulets
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Afflictions
Ayin harah – “Evil eye”
The age of the universe
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Honoring Parents

Jacob was not punished for being remiss in honoring his parents while studying at the yeshiva of Shame and Ever for 14 years. Talmud thereby derives, “Greater is Torah study than honoring parents” (Megilla 16b-17a).

Rashi teaches that when Jacob worked for Lavan—and traveled—for 22 years total, and did not honor his parents during this term, he was equally punished with the loss of Joseph for 22 years. This teaches that honoring parents is obligatory.

Our morning prayers list certain mitzvahs where one “enjoys the fruits in this world, but the essential reward is received in the next world”, and honoring parents is listed first. This clearly prioritizes honoring parents. However, Torah study is lastly cited as greater than the entire list...including honoring parents.

We learn that while honoring parents is a great mitzvah, Torah study surpasses it. So when Jacob was involved in Torah study, he was not held accountable for being remiss in honoring his parents. But when working for Lavan and traveling 22 years—although doing so for important purposes of marriage and family—this did not exempt him from the obligation of honoring his parents. He was thereby punished commensurately by losing Joseph for 22 years.

Honoring parents is a great command because it drives us towards accepting authority, our parents. But our parents are only a model authority for our ultimate acceptance of God's authority. Therefore, Torah study, which is the pursuit of God's authority—our primary goal—overrides honoring parents, which is only a vehicle towards accepting God.

Therefore, unless you are engaged in Torah study, meaning you are involved in other pursuits, you must decline those other pursuits, and instead, you must honor your parents over those pursuits. For other pursuits remove you from honoring parents, a mitzvah which targets accepting God as your authority. ■



Moshe's Leadership Style

Rabbi Reuven Mann

This week's Parsha, Shemot, initiates the second Book of the Torah, which tells the story of the enslavement of the Jewish People and their redemption. This happened because Hashem intervenes in human affairs to achieve His purposes. In addition, He designates certain people to carry out various aspects of the endeavor.

With regard to the Exodus of the Jews and their transition into the Chosen People, no human was more consequential than Moshe. Hashem wanted him to assume the leadership of the Jews in the struggle to obtain freedom from Pharaoh. Subsequently, he would lead the People in receiving and implementing the Torah. This is quite an astounding assignment for any individual. Ironically, Moshe was averse to the position, and he resisted vociferously until he was coerced into taking it.

Once he accepted the mission, Moshe was absolutely dedicated to its success and the well-being of his people. As instructed, he engaged the leading sages and convinced them—with reasoning and demonstrations—that he was, indeed, an authentic prophet of Hashem and that the time of their liberation had come.

The next move was for his brother Aaron, himself and the Elders to appear before Pharaoh and present Hashem's demand that he let them journey into the wilderness to offer sacrifices to G-d. The Torah only records that Moshe and Aaron proceeded to confront Pharaoh but what about the Elders? The Rabbis assert that they accompanied the

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two leaders at the outset of their trip to the King but slipped away, one by one, as they got closer to the palace.

Obviously, it took a great deal of courage to stand before Pharaoh and state their demand, and we can now understand why only Moshe and his brother were fit for this task. Time and again, Moshe put his life on the line in fulfilling the tasks of his role, not only in defiance of Pharaoh but in holding firm against the complaints of his fellow Jews, as well. (Concerning whom Moshe said, “Just a bit more, and they will stone me.”)

Moshe’s initial encounter with the Egyptian Ruler went very badly. At that point, Pharaoh was smug and arrogant and seemingly fearless. He bragged, “Who is Hashem that I should listen to His voice. I do not know Hashem and, additionally, I will not send out Israel. (Shemot 5:2)” [Chutzpah!]

But this was not enough. Apparently, Pharaoh had some concern about the possible influence of Moshe on his downtrodden slaves, so he felt he had to teach them a lesson. He increased their workload by withholding straw and demanding that they provide the same daily quota of bricks as before, a task which seemed impossible.

The Jews were crushed and took out their anger on Moshe. “They (the foremen of the Jews) encountered Moshe and Aaron standing opposite them as they left Pharaoh’s presence. They said to them, ‘May Hashem look upon you and judge, for you have made our very scent abhorrent in the eyes of Pharaoh and the eyes of his servants, to place a sword in their hands to murder us. (Shemot 5:20-21)’”

This turn of events impacted Moshe in a very painful way, and he “returned” to Hashem and said, “My Lord why have You harmed this people, why have You sent me? From the time I came to Pharaoh to speak in Your Name, he harmed this people, but You did not rescue Your people.” Hashem responded, “Now you will see what I shall do to Pharaoh, for through a strong hand will he send them out, and through a strong hand will he drive them from his land. (Shemot 5:21,22-6:1)”

This exchange between Moshe and the Creator is one of the most baffling dialogues in the entire Torah. Especially



unexpected are the harsh words Moshe addressed to Hashem, seemingly complaining about the manner in which He was handling the situation. Didn’t Moshe have absolute faith that Hashem knew what was best and that He would carry out the liberation of the Jews in the proper time and manner? How are we to understand his harsh complaint against Hashem?

The great Biblical commentator Ibn Ezra explains that Moshe was perplexed by the sudden setback; because while he knew that it would take time for Egypt to be crushed, he nevertheless expected that once he appeared before Pharaoh things would begin to improve and certainly would not get any worse. Yet, the situation of the Jews had deteriorated because of his demand to Pharaoh and this almost completely demolished his standing with the Jewish people.

I would like to suggest another factor which enables us to understand the reaction of Moshe to this unanticipated

negative development. The Torah describes that Moshe was given his name by the compassionate daughter of Pharaoh, who had rescued him from the River. “She called his name Moshe, as she said, ‘For I drew him from the water.’ (Shemot 2:10)”

At first glance, this name merely recounts an occurrence and does not seem to have great significance. However, the Sforno explains; “And she called his name Moshe. He who rescues and draws forth others from trouble (and danger).”

The name of a person can have a great impact in forging his personality. Pharaoh’s daughter wanted Moshe to internalize the principle of intervening against oppression and rescuing the lives of innocents in danger, as this quality was responsible for his very survival. As Rabbi Raphael Pelcowitz Z”L explains in his notes on the Sforno, “...he was called by a name reflecting his eventual role as a rescuer, a role played by Moshe over a prolonged period...”

Indeed, Moshe displayed great courage and determination to get involved on behalf of victims of oppression. When he saw the Egyptian beating the Jewish slave, he took immediate action and slew the culprit. When he encountered two Jews fighting, he confronted the aggressor “And said to the wicked one, ‘Why would you strike your fellow?’” Because of his bold and righteous actions, Moshe had to escape for his life, but that did not seem to deter him. For when he witnessed the daughters of Yitro being driven away by the shepherds, “Moshe got up and saved them and watered their sheep.”

Moshe was the kind of person who took hasty action to correct an evil in progress and obtain quick results. He therefore expected that when Hashem intervened to rescue the Jews, there would be some beneficial results right away, even though the entire process would take some time. Moshe had not yet mastered the challenge of the *Derech Arucha* (the extended path) in which there is a long and slow process spanning many centuries until all is ready for the ultimate redemption. May it happen speedily and in our time.

Shabbat Shalom. ■

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