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The Song of the Day

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

The Talmud in Rosh Hashanna 31a discusses the reasoning behind the various songs which were recited each day together with the afternoon sacrifice. We now recite them each morning at the end of the morning prayers, usually following Alenu. They are referred to as the "Song of the Day". It is interesting to note the Talmud's reasoning for the Song of the Day, as each day's song was selected to correlate to some element which was created on that corresponding day of the week during God's creation of the world.

Sunday, we speak of God's complete rulership, as this was the day in which God brought matter from non existence into existence. Giving existence to that which did not exist is the ultimate demonstration of rulership.

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The New Moon Blessing

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

This article will describe the concepts found within the "Kiddush HaChodesh", the blessing upon the New Moon.

First, let us familiarize ourselves with the actual text:

"Blessed are you God, our God, King of the world, that with Your statements (You) created the heavens, and with the breath of your mouth, all the hosts thereof. A statute and time did You place for them, that they should not deviate their circuits. Happy and joyous (are the heavenly spheres) to do the will of their Creator. Worker of truth Whose works are truth, and unto the moon You declared that it should renew (itself), a glorious crown to those (mankind) born of the womb, as they (mankind) will eventually renew themselves as the moon, and to exalt their Creator for the name of the glory His kingdom. Blessed are You God, Who renews the months."

Now we will address each section. "with Your statements (You) created the heavens, and with the breath of your mouth, all the hosts thereof." This first praise deals with the heavens and their contents. As God does not "speak", and of course prior to man's creation, speech would be superfluous as there are no beings existing who can hear, therefore the concept of "statements" and "breath" teach us something else in connection with God. Speech is a very simple activity, and when applied to God, it denotes that His mere will suffices to create the most awesome physical bodies. Additionally, it is a general principle that one cannot offer partial praise in connection with God. The Talmud teaches that if one visits a place where one of the miracles wrought on his behalf took place, it is not sufficient if he praises God for that miracle alone, but he must also refer to and bless God for other miracles which were wrought on his behalf. Daniel also followed this principle when God had revealed to Daniel, both, Nevuchadnezzar's dream content, and interpretation. Upon Daniel's receipt of an answer to his request from God for this information, Daniel praised God for

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ASK YOUR CHILDREN:

"What does the moon do that nothing else does?" Then ask them "Why did Hashem make it that way?"

Questions & Answers

RABBI REUVEN MANN

Response to a question regarding how to respond to a superior's disapproval:

This is a most complicated issue ie. a case of ego depletion which can only be satisfied by the approval (parental love) of others. If it's any comfort you are not alone in this area: it is a universal problem and in this era of the "me" generation is probably more prominent than ever before. Obviously it can't be solved by an Email, but I will make some points for starters. I believe that your philosophical and psychological insights are accurate and important. You are affected by your employer's (re.parental substitute) opinions for 2 reasons: 1) You mistakenly assume that they are a reflection of reality when they are not; either because (as you say) they just reflect his mood of the moment or his reaction to something you are doing--- not a carefully considered evaluation of the true worth of your efforts. 2) The major mistake is that you attribute reality to the feelings others have about you, "It is a good for someone to like me and an evil for someone to dislike me". This is the philosophical error of living in the world of the social reality. You must always remember (and tefilla can help alot in this area) that the only thing that matters is how you appear in the sight of G-d; that is the only truth and the only value and the only thing worth striving for in this existence. We should only care about what G-d thinks about us and realize that taking seriously the opinions of others only gives a false sense of security (when positive) or insecurity (when negative).

However simple understanding of these ideas is not enough, for the emotional pull to

approval is very powerful. Hence we need to adopt the method of behavioral change advocated by the Rambam. This means exercising very strict self control and not indulging the emotions in this area. If you were an actor I would prohibit you from reading the reviews. You would go a long period of time not indulging the desire to know if people like your work or not. If you heard something positive you would be commanded to exercise control over the desire to luxuriate in the good feeling of being loved. You would be told to stop thinking about it or to recognize the emotional insecurity which is prompting it and realize how fleeting and insignificant praise is and just move on. When you understand that praise is like a drug creating a dependency for more and making you a slave to the whims of others, while harming your soul, you will, over time, grow to despise it. At the same time you must react differently to disapproval. You must think over the issue clearly and objectively. If you did something wrong then address yourself to that (ie. be selfish, removing a defect is important,...but eliciting a certain attitude in another person is a waste of time). When the sick feeling of perceived disapproval begins to come over you exercise mental discipline and don't give in to it. Force yourself to gain control over the emotion. Go ahead with your work or get involved in learning as chazal say "if this ugly one grabs hold of you drag it to the Bais Hamedrash". After a long period of exercising this control, together with increased philosophical insight the balance of emotional forces will begin to shift in your favor.

The Song of the Day

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

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Monday: Manipulation of existing matter shows sovereignty, or kingship - the theme on Monday - as God divided the upper and lower waters via the creation of the firmament (atmosphere). Amazing, however is the act of manipulating the firmament. The creation of matter from nothingness surpasses manipulation qualitatively. Interesting also is that kingship is not dependent on man's existence, as man was not created until day six, nonetheless, God is referred to as a "king" on day two.

Tuesday: In the third day in creation, God made land appear, and made it inhabitable. We therefore sing the song describing God as "standing in the congregation of God". Standing refers to land upon which man requires for standing. That God stands in the congregation of God teaches that man's existence finds purpose only when man lives in a congregation of God, that is, man recognizing God.

Wednesday: On the fourth day God created the luminaries, namely the sun. Therefore, the Talmud continues, we describe God as a vengeful God, Who will exact punishment from those who worshipped the sun.

Thursday: On day five, God created birds, among other things. We therefore read "sing unto God...". The reasoning given is that since man is impressed by the various species of fowl, man is struck with awe and an urge to sing praises to God.

Friday: We commence song with "God is robed in majesty", as on day six, God completed the works of creation on that day and rules over them.

Sabbath: We read the "song of Sabbath", referencing to the ultimate day of rest, the Next World.

The questions I would like to address are the following:

Question 1) What are the general concepts described by each daily song?

Question 2) Why are these concepts not in line with mere creation, but also incorporate concepts like revenge, kingship, etc., which are outside the realm of the created objects themselves?

Question 3) What is the concept of referring to creation on each of the six days of the week, when the Sabbath is already devoted to commemorating God of creation?

Question 4) Why not simply recall all seven ideas each and every day,

instead of only one idea per day? Why are we mimicking creation by following a seven day week, and aligning our days with God's days of creation?

We must say that the Rabbis saw it essential that man have cognizance of the God of creation, not only one day a week on the Sabbath, but each day. This is proven by the fact that we recite songs dealing with elements of creation each day. This idea I believe is actually borne out of a passage in Genesis, where the Torah states, "six days you shall do your work and on the seventh day, rest". If this passage is to teach the command of the Sabbath, there is no need to make mention of what we should do on the six other days. Simply telling us to rest on the seventh day suffices. Since in this passage we do find a discussion of the other six days in connection with the Sabbath, I conclude that these days partake of the very concept of the Sabbath. Meaning, we are to be cognizant of God's creation not only on Shabbos, but on each day of the week, and we are to do so by recalling some aspect created on that day.

This could very well be the source for the idea of reciting songs dealing with creation on a daily basis. It also makes sense that the main idea man must be mindful of, should not be limited to only one seventh of his life. Contemplating that God is the Creator is critical enough that we should ponder it daily. (This answers "Question 3" above)

I would answer the remaining 3 questions above as follows:

Answer 1) Which ideas of creation are so essential for us to ponder weekly? This is exactly what the Rabbis were discussing in the Talmud:

Sunday: The first idea is that God has complete mastery over the world, to the point, that He can simply will matter into existence. Correlating to God's act of creating matter from nothingness. We must recognize God's unique ability to create, the world is His.

Monday: God's separation of created matter-the firmament. We must recognize God's role as King.

Tuesday: God made land appear and made it inhabitable. We must recognize God willed man to exist only in as much as he partakes of his intelligence and learns about the Creator.

Wednesday: God is vengeful. We must recognize God desires and dispenses man's justice.

Thursday: God's created multitudes of species for man to stand in awe. That God gave us the perfect means by which to achieve His goal for us, our

surroundings are designed to call attention to the existence of a Creator with magnificent abilities. (Perhaps birds call our attention to creation more than other species as they sing beautifully, attracting not only our sight, but our audible sense as well.)

Friday: Initially I thought this day taught us that God's completion of creation displays that He did not deviate from His plan - teaching that God is trustworthy. However, after discussing this with a friend Jesse Fishbein, she asked that God being consistent should really be part of God's justice, as justice by definition means that God is equal to all, which is based on consistent acts. I agreed. I then realized that what is left from the central points of creation is that one might feel that God can create and leave the scene, letting all creation be Godless. However, this is impossible, as all matter cannot exist of its own, as is proved by the very fact that is was brought into existence by God. This is an essential point. Matter would not have been created without God, and it also requires regular maintenance of its existence to continue existing. If God would not will something to exist, it would cease to be. I believe this to be the concept of the sixth day. That is, that God completed the works of creation, but it continues, "and rules over them". Meaning, He continually supplies all matter with existence. This is actually a statement in our prayers, "uvi'tuvo michadesh b'chol yom tamid maaaseh beraishis", "He renews the works of creation each day regularly."

Sabbath: Through the act of "resting" on God's part, God made a point of teaching us that abstinence from creation is firstly a positive quality, and secondly, was actually the goal of creation, as He blessed the Sabbath day, clearly distinguishing its elevated status. God created physical beings so they may partake of the highest good, that is the world of ideas, which like Sabbath, is not limited to the physical. On the Sabbath absolutely no matter was created, and being blessed teaches that this is God's desired state for man.

Answer 2) The physical world is not the goal of creation, but rather, the goal is man's reflection on ideas. It is for this reason that the Rabbis aligned each day, not with simple matter, but with a concept essential to man's existence, thereby teaching us that we aren't simply praising God for the creation which would make the physical an ends, but we are praising God for the higher aspects of creation, the world of ideas.

Question 4) This question I must think into more. ☐

Gilgul: Flawed Arguments

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

Below is an actual dialogue.

I will show the flaws in the "Responder's" answers:

☐

Line01 Questioner: Is there such a thing as a gilgul?☐

Line02 Responder: Yes☐

Line03 Questioner: How do you know?☐

Line04 Responder: The Zohar says so☐

Line05 Questioner: What is the translation of gilgul?☐

Line06 Responder: Reincarnation☐

Line07 Questioner: OK then, look at this article....☐

Line08 Responder: Oh I know about him,.....he did say gilgulim are wrong, he disrespected Rav Ovadiah Yosef for saying the Jews killed in WWII were gilgulim☐

Line09 Responder: Lots of reasons. I haven't seen that site in a couple of years I think. He totally has weird ideas about Judaism☐

Line10 Questioner: What makes you say he is wrong?☐

Line11 Responder: Because he makes no sense☐

Line12 Questioner: Why not? Please explain☐

Line13 Responder: Explain what?☐

Line14 Questioner: How he makes no sense, give me an example☐

Line15 Responder: He wrote how Rav Ovadiah Yosef saying Jews who were killed re: gilgulim, when its a perfectly legitimate point of view.☐

Line16 Responder: He had no sources to back himself up.☐

Line17 Questioner: He said Saadia Gaon calls reincarnation "absurd".☐

Line18 Responder: Yeah well even if we will accept that, there are others who say its not absurd, so why isn't Rav Ovadiah allowed to follow the others?

Mesora's Comments:

Responder's first error is in Line 04. He sides with a view for no other reason than it being voiced by some source - not based on any analysis of truth. What would he do if he found another source with the opposing view? Would he abandon his current position? And if so, is this any reflection of reason on his part? Certainly not. He is merely "following the leader", and not using his mind at all. If he follows ideas based on the fact that an authority claims such a view, he will not be able to select a position in every area of life where

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The New Moon Blessing

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

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His ability to set up and dethrone kings, and for His ability to reveal knowledge to wise men in general. Only subsequent to this praise, did Daniel praise God for the specific information revealed to him in response to his request.

I believe that this teaches us what true praise of God consists of. It is not merely praise in response to an individual act performed for oneself. Such a praise would dwarf the true, immense scope of God's Omniscience and Omnipotence. To praise God as accurately as humanly possible, man must speak of God's might and Knowledge in the most broad and all inclusive sense. True praise of God therefore must be about Him, not about what he does for us.

Therefore, we first praise God in general terms - we exalt Him for the works of the heavens as a whole independent of man, prior to exalting Him on account of the moon which is solely, or man.

"A statute and time did You place for them, that they should not deviate their circuits." Here we find the blessing referring not to the physical creation, but to the other half of creation, I refer to the governing laws. All matter was created in a physical state, but that such a state continuing in a behavior is not a natural result of the physical body's existence. Matter must also have governing laws so that i.e., all trees reproduce their own kind, all animals beget their own kind. Laws of gravity, inertia, and all other constants did not come into being simply because matter was created. As well, all members of mankind partake of similar psychological characteristics due to governing laws.

In creation therefore, God brought into being two distinct categories; 1) matter, 2) laws governing that matter. (I believe the second chapter in Genesis alludes to the second category.)



In application to the heavens, we would be remiss in our praise of God if we did not include praise for God's wisdom manifested through the relentless paths in which the heavenly spheres travel.

"Happy and joyous (are they) to do the will of their Creator." This statement on the surface implies awareness on the part of brute creation. Animals have no self awareness, much less inanimate objects. How then are we to understand this? □

I believe "happiness" here denotes the removal of conflict. Meaning, the spheres function with exactitude, as there are no impediments between God's will for the spheres to rotate and revolve, and between their physical performance.

So there are 3 praises thus far; 1) Praise for the physical heavens, 2) Praise for their governing laws, 3) Praise for God, for the perfect system of creation, where God willed something, and there is no conflict intervening between God's will and the immediacy of the reality of His will. God's will is all that is real

and all that stands. He has no opponents.

"Worker of truth Whose works are truth" This statement I believe is connected with the next, indicating that God's works have a purpose. They aim towards propagating some true idea, as the physical for the sake of the physical is of no purpose. This King Solomon said in the very beginning of his work, "Koheles". The spheres therefore - as is the case with all creation - must have a purpose outside of themselves. "Truth" indicates that there is a purpose in the works of God. This is the new concept indicated here.

This I believe is that purpose:

"and unto the moon You declared that it should renew (itself), a glorious crown to those born of the womb, as they will eventually renew themselves as the moon" Here we find the purpose and essence of the distinction which God gave to the moon. The moon is the singular object in the heavens which was designed by God to pass through phases of waxing and waning. The purpose is stated, that it should be a crown to man. A "crown" means that which marks the elevated distinction of something. Man's elevated distinction is his free will, in specific here, the free will follows the path of a righteous life. Just as the moon grows full and then loses its grandeur, man also goes through cycles of perfection and sin. But man is given a great gift by God through the moon, as God placed the moon's phases as a sign to all mankind that man too can once again become great, just as the moon. The moon then is a parable to man's constant failures and victories, to remind man that although he stumbles, he can - like the moon - become "full" once again.

This teaches us the level of import which God wished to give to repentance. Nowhere else do we see God creating a unique behavior displayed in a specific object in creation solely for the purpose of reminding man that repentance is always within his grasp.

One more idea contained in these words is the meaning of "those born of the womb". I wonder why man is referred to in this peculiar fashion, as opposed to saying "a glorious crown to man". I think however, that the idea is to draw a distinction between man and the cosmos. The moon, that which is unchanging in its laws, is a crown - a mark of distinction - to man, a being borne of the womb, who is destined to human error. The idea is that the moon's phases are a reminder to man who always "phases" from sin to repentance. Referring to man as "borne of the womb" highlights - via contrast to the moon - that man is only human.

My chavrusa Howard Salamon explained well that "those born of the womb" also teaches that just as an infant prior to exiting the womb is free of sin, so are we able to be via repentance. This statement alludes to our inherent capacity to be as pure as we were before birth. A person is not free of sin because he repents. A person is free of sin only when he uses true bechira and repents for

that particular sin since no one is ever free from sin.

The new moon symbolizes free will. When man uses true bechira his whole being is "illuminated" by truth and he is in line with the will of the Creator. That is man's crown of "elevated distinction". The renewal of the moon each month is to remind man that he was created with and has the ability to exercise his free will - which is what distances him from sin. His continuous reflection removes man from his desire to sin.

"and to exalt their Creator for the sake of the glory His kingdom" This teaches that repentance is not a goal, but the goal is to finally recognize God's greatness.

"Blessed are You God, Who renews the months." □

False Ideas: Tzimtzum

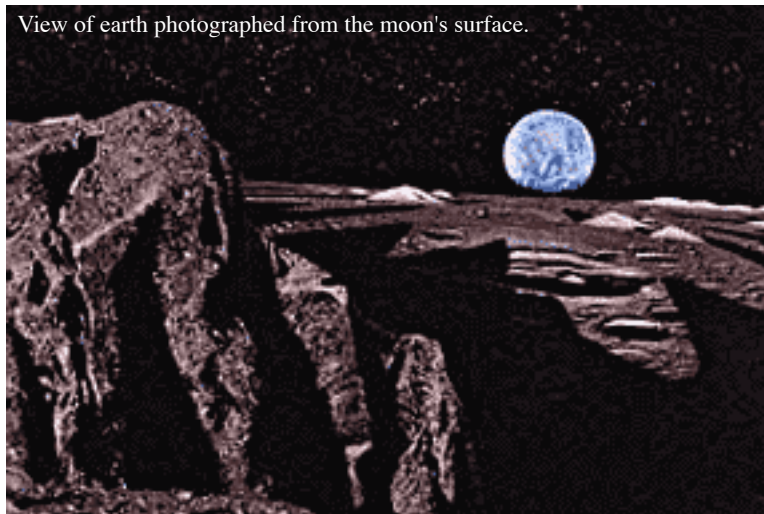
RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

Following is a discussion between myself and a reader wishing to explain "tzimtzum", a proposed concept that G-d "contracted" Himself to allow 'place' for the physical world to exist:

Reader: "I think it makes perfect sense. I am probably am elucidating myself clearly. Tzimtzum didn't take place in the center of everything, since there is no center of God. Now basically, what is meant by God removing himself from this 'circle', which means the place in which the universe exists in, the realm of the universe and all physical things (that's the circle, it's not to be taken literally). The whole thing with God removing Himself from this area is also not to be taken literally. If right now, everyone in the world would see God, in a sense, what happened in Mt. Sinai, where the shechina is present, or they see yam soof split, or anything that makes GOD 100% visible and knowable to everyone, even the biggest atheist, will anyone commit a sin? Will any student break school rules RIGHT IN FRONT, FACE TO FACE WITH THERE PRINCIPLE OF THE SCHOOL? Only a moron would, because its totally illogical. And if they wouldn't do it in front of a principle, who would do it in front of Hashem!"

Mesora: G-d does not prefer miracles, as it is from coercion that a person follows the Torah after having seen miracles. Rather, G-d desires that men see the beauty in the perfection of such a rational and pleasing system, a system where all laws achieve a perfection in man's state of being, and in his thoughts. This is how G-d desires that men follow

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Is Islam Based on Truth?

RIVKA OLENICK

According to Islamic ideology, "The Koran (the Islamic Holy book) is God's literal word, and can only be comprehended in the Arabic language in which it was revealed."

The above statement, "The Koran is God's literal word", is not a truth. If analyzed properly this statement would be confusing to those who assume this religion is based on absolute truth. We know that God revealed Himself at Mt. Sinai, as witnessed by millions of Jews. The Torah says in Exodus 19, 9: "And the Lord said unto Moses: Lo, I come unto thee in a thick cloud, that the people may hear when I speak with thee, and may also believe thee for ever." This sentence in and of itself is a foundation of truth. The ONE God spoke to Moses, the ONE God who created all existence and Whose word is divine.

Islam believes their prophet Mohammed was spoken to by God through an angel. According to the Rambam, regarding prophecy, all prophets other than Moses received their prophecy through an angel. However, Mohammed was not a true prophet to begin with, and did not follow the divine word of God nor the truths that Moses taught.

It says in Deuteronomy 13:2: "If there arise in the midst of thee a prophet, or a dreamer of dreams and he give thee a sign or a wonder, and the sign or the wonder come to pass, whereof he spoke unto thee- saying: 'Let us go after other gods, which thou hast not known, and let us serve them,' thou shalt not hearken unto the words of that prophet, or that dreamer of dreams, for the Lord your God putteth you to proof, to know whether ye do love the Lord your God with all your heart and all your soul. After the Lord your God shall ye walk, and Him shall ye fear, and His commandments shall ye keep, and unto His voice shall ye hearken, and Him shall ye serve, and unto Him shall ye cleave. And that prophet, or that dreamer of dreams, shall be put to death; for he hath spoken perversion against the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, and redeemed thee out of the house of bondage, to draw thee aside out of the way which the Lord thy God commanded thee to walk in. So shalt thou put away the evil from the midst of thee."

Parts of the Koran contain the Old Testament, The New Testament, The Bible, the Apocrypha (writings that are not considered authentic according to Judaism) and the Talmud. By combining the written word of the three major religions, makes it a respectable book in

the eyes of the rest of the world and gives credence to the concepts of what Islam believes as truths. However, this book was cleverly put together this way to legitimize only their beliefs. Since we believe that God revealed His divine word only to Moses - then only those words of Torah are true - absolute truth. "Absolute" meaning no words other than what was given to Moses is real truth. So, the Koran not only confuses one who is looking for truths, it taints and warps the Old Testament which is true. The Koran, therefore is not divine or based on absolute truth.

By reading the following statement, you can detect the hatred propagated by Islam against absolute truth: Not only in the concepts of the statements, but by denying what is absolute truth. By creating their own book based on what they believe to be truth, the foundations of Islamic ideology are tangled in many contradictions.

None shall enter paradise unless he be a Jew or a Christian. Those are their vain desires. Produce your proof if ye are truthful. Nay whoever submits his whole self to Allah and is a doer of good he will get his reward with his Lord, on such shall be no fear nor shall they grieve. Koran 2: 111 and 112.

In summary, there is only one God - and belief in God means that one believes in God's divine word. This is logical. If God created all existence then all of what God instructs in His word is absolute truth. No alternation to truth can be made by any human being, even through prophecy. If one letter of the Written Word is altered, this automatically denies the divine truth and God's word. There can be no alterations made to the divine word of God.

"Nothing else shall be a god to you alongside. My omnipresent and all-pervading dominion." Exodus 20:3.

During the Messianic Age, which is ideologically based on the 12th Principle, (of our "Thirteen Principles of Faith") (Yigdal), the world will recognize all the "false" prophets of other religions and know that only the knowledge of Torah is true.

God will restore your fortunes, have mercy on you, and gather you (again from all the countries where He has scattered you). If He were to banish you to the ends of the heavens (the Lord your God will bring you) to the land that your fathers occupied. You will occupy it again, and He will make you even more prosperous and numerous than your fathers). Deuteronomy 30:3-5

I will then give all peoples a pure tongue, that they may call in the name of God, and all serve Him in one manner." Zephania 3:9

All the world will be filled with knowledge." Isaiah 2:4

False Ideas: Tzimtzum

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

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However, arguing that one would control himself in front of those who he fears, is no proof for tzimtzum.

Reader: "what is meant by him (G-d) vacating this space is, that he conceals himself in this world. how many people, even jews dont believe god, letzarenoo. why is this so? because god is not directly present in the world."

Mesora: But doesn't the Torah say, "Milo kol ha-aretz kvodo", "His glory fills the whole world"??

Reader: "albeit you and i and every orthodox, or even unorthodox knows god is here, because we see all the nissim he does for us, but others, atheists, see them as coincidences. the reason not every person in the world beleivs in god is because he is not directly evident. i know personally a person who says, i dont believe in god because i cant see him. when i can see him, i will believe."

Mesora: So, since a fool requires to have physical evidence, this you feel is a proof that there cannot be proof of G-d's existence without such evidence? Are you trying to prove from a fool's words that G-d is really not provable? Have you not read the passages in Deuteronomy (The giving of the Torah on Sinai) which form the basis of the Judaic proofs of G-d?

As the author of the Chovas Halavavos stated, G-d desires that man approach the truth - which is provable - by using his mind, and not by being overtaken by his emotions, which happens upon witnessing miracles. The proofs exist, otherwise we have no reason to follow G-d, and we would be as those nations who merely follow by faith, without using reason. This is against G-d's will, and is His reason for giving us the intellect. Proof of G-d is the most important concept one can have. If the mind is not to be used in this area, then it might as well not be used at all.

Reader: "if everyone saw him, everyone would believe, therefore our free will is diminished, and thats the essential factor that reward and punishment is based on. so that deminshes the whole concept of gan eden, because why should robots get rewards?"

I hope you understand what im saying so far. now by god concealing himself in this world i.e. not making himself directly apparent (or else my riend wouldnt have to say, when i see god i will believe), our free will remains. because we are now not robots. what doesnt make sense about this? god s omnipresent. he is everywhere, not in the physical sense, as in that he takes up room, but, i know you agree that he has no limits, and if he is not everywhere, that

means he is limited to be someplaces and not other. becuase he if wasnt limited, he would be everywhere."

Mesora: This is where your mistake is generated from. You say that He takes up no room, but in the sentence immediately following you say if He wasn't limited He would be everywhere! It is clear that you feel G-d takes up space. This is impossible, and it is why you entertain the concept of tzimtzum, i.e., G-d 'removing' Himself to allow for "space" for the physical world. This is apostasy, i.e., to hold of the concept that G-d is in anyway physical, or takes up space, or has to diminish Himself to allow for the physical. Calling this non literal, or metaphoric does not help your cause, as it makes no sense as a metaphor. Metaphors need a rational underlying principle in order that the metaphor makes sense. You have shown no such rational principle.

To say G-d must "diminish" himself makes no sense, as how do you use physical terms (diminish) in application to G-d?

I feel another germ which causes this disease is the baseless need for a person to force an explanation upon topics where we have no ability to comprehend.

Reader: ".....how can a human understand how He works and creates? our minds cannot grasp such thoughts, so concepts like tzimtzum are applied, and are not to be taken literally, but as comparisons and analogies to certain godly actions."

Mesora: This is my point exactly, man cannot comprehend certain ideas. So I do not understand why you cleave to this concept of tzimtzum which you just said describes what man cannot understand. Tzimtzum according to you is an analogy for something beyond man's grasp. But if that is true, then the analogy is futile, as all analogies are only worthwhile if they achieve their purpose of elucidating something which man can eventually grasp. But as you said, tzimtzum is outside of man's capabilities. I suggest you abandon entertaining it further.

To quote the first Mishna in Chap. II , Talmud Chagiga, "If man ponders four things, it is better that he was never created (they are) what is above the earth, what is below, what came before the Earth, and what succeeds it".

You wish to ponder what came before the earth, (how it was created) The Mishna prohibits this area from "histachlus", pondering, as it is outside of man's grasp. This is why it states that it would be better if such a person was not created, as he is not fulfilling his purpose in creation by studying attainable knowledge.

Man must admit of his shortcomings and accept that there are areas beyond his understanding. Regardless of how many books are written on tzimtzum, if an idea makes no sense, as this idea, then it should not be followed.

This mishna teaches that man's goal is to ponder the attainable, and further, that this area is unattainable. □

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Gilgul: Flawed Arguments

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

Continued from page 2)

disputes are found. He will be stuck, as there are many opinions in many cases.

More essentially, Responder is not selecting an opinion because of content. Therefore, he lacks any benefit, as holding an opinion alone does nothing for a person. Only when reasoning is engaged, do a person's words reflect his knowledge. But if one simply mimics another's position, he thereby attests to his complete ignorance of reason. He is as a marionette who responds to the pulls of the puppeteer's strings. As the marionette knows not why he makes such movements, so also Responder knows not why he follows others. Just as the marionette is not applauded for his movements, so too, Responder cannot merit anything he mimics. His views are not his, and he gains nothing by espousing them. The only person of merit is one who arrives at ideas based on reasoning. Then, such a person achieves conviction of what is real in the world. Reasoning alone is the one tool with which one learns real ideas about the nature of the world and the Torah. Through reason, man builds fact upon fact, uncovering more and more truths grounded solid in reality. Only this person performs the will of God, to use what God gave him. Only this person uses his tzelem Elokim - his intelligence. Only this person actually "knows" anything.

I wonder what the goal is in a person who thinks as does Responder, who defends an opinion without an iota of knowledge why he should defend it. To me, quite frankly, the person is a liar, and doesn't know it: He wishes to imbue another person with the notion that opinion "A" is right, but he simultaneously has no idea why. Nonetheless, he desires that others agree with his view. This demonstrates insecurity and falsehood.

Responder errs again in Line 08. He makes a claim that 'respect' must be shown. This is proved false quite simply: If even a Rabbi tells you that God is really two beings, and not one, you do not agree out of respect. Reason tells us the person is wrong. Nothing else matters but reason. Not his title as Rabbi, not his numbers of followers. Reason alone is to be respected. As we read Lines 11 and 15, Responder makes claims using terms as "sense and "legitimate", but fails to provide any intelligent argumentation. Throwing words around which have a semblance of rational argumentation is sometimes deceiving. But we see he does not follow up with explanations.

Line 16 Responder says that 'sources' is the method for arriving at truth. Here we see his primary flaw. Responder holds the opinion that a source alone suffices to prove something as correct. So this means that any time any person says something, it is true? as he now became a "source"? Responder will of course say that the source must be a viable source. To which I reply, "what makes a source viable?" He will be forced to conclude that reason must be the decisive factor.

Responder then contradicts himself. First, Responder says sources is sufficient, but when he is shown a source, he changes his argument in order to defend his position. We see that the true intent of Responder is to defend his view, and not arrive at truth. He switches to whatever argument will safeguard him from having to admit error.

If we probe this point, we can deduce the emotion driving Responder: That is the need for acceptance. This emotion cripples all too many people from discovering true ideas, as their desire for acceptance outweighs their search for truth. But if Responder thought about this, who is he trying to be accepted by? Others with the same disease? other people who themselves are also following the leader? I ask, "where is the leader?" It is pathetic.

In Torah, the true leader is God. He created all the reality we see. He gave us the gift of reason so we can study these beautiful ideas. We go against His will and lose our single chance at a true life when we abandon our minds like this, looking over our shoulders to see what everyone else does and thinks. The Rabbis of blessed memory didn't behave this way. They argued vehemently on each other - as we should. Personalities, acceptance, respect.....all these emotional considerations must not enter the picture when we learn.

In Line 18, Responder feels the discussion is about "who can follow who", as he says, "why isn't Rav Ovadiah allowed to follow the others?" In reality, Questioner was asking in Line 12 for explanations of content. Questioner was not asking "who should I follow?" Questioner sought truth, whereas Responder was trapped in his mind set of "who can follow who".

Yes, people need to feel they are following a leader. At the early stages of youth, a child has no other choice, as he has not enough knowledge or reasoning abilities to arrive at truth independently. But once intellectually mature, the Torah requires one to engage his own mind and arrive at his own conclusions. This is why God endowed EACH man with intelligence. If mimicking was man's goal, intelligence would not have been given to man. ■

God's Existence: Belief or Proof?

Quotes and Comments

Avraham Avenu (Taken from Maimonides' Mishneh Torah, section on Idolatry, Chap.1:3) "Once the mighty ancient (Avraham) was weaned, he began to ponder in his mind, and he was still a child, and he began to consider day and night, and he was amazed that there could be this sphere operating regularly without a guide, one who causes it to rotate, as it is impossible that it should rotate itself. And he (Avraham) had no teacher nor informant, rather, he was entrenched in Ur Casdim amongst the foolish idolaters, and his father and mother and all the people worshiped the stars, and he (Avraham) worshiped with them, but his heart stirred and he understood until he reached the truth and understood the line of truth from his own proper understanding. And he knew there was One God Who guided the sphere and created everything and that there was no other god to be found besides Him. And he knew the entire world was mistaken and the matter which caused them to make this error was that they served the stars and (physical) formations until they lost the truth from their minds. And at 40 years of age, Avraham recognized his Creator. Once he recognized and knew, he began responding on the inhabitants of Ur Casdim and calling them to court saying this is not the way of truth which you follow, and he broke the idols, and he began to inform the people that it is not fitting to worship (anyone) except for the God of the world, and it is fitting that one sacrifice and pour libations to Him so other generations will recognize Him. And it is fitting to destroy and break all the (idolatrous) formations so the whole people won't be led astray, like these who think there is no God, only these (idols). Once (Avraham) succeeded over them with proofs the king sought to kill him, and there was done for him a miracle and he went to Charan. And he began to stand and call in a great voice and made known to the whole world there is One God to the whole world and unto Him one should worship."

Moshe Rabbeinu (Moses) (Deut. 4:9): "Guard yourselves and guard your souls exceedingly, lest you forget the things your eyes saw...". (Deut. 4:34)"all the signs and wonders which God has performed for you in Egypt as your eyes have seen". (Deut. 4:35) "You have been demonstrated to know that God is Elokim, there is no other besides Him". (Deut. 4:36) "From the heavens He made heard His voice to prove you, and on land He showed you His great fire and His words you heard from amidst the fire".

Was Moses lying to the people? Would the Jews have proliferated Moses' words had they not been convinced themselves? One need not be told what he has seen with his own eyes. The Jews knew they witnessed proof of God's existence. They therefore passed it on to their children as it was undeniable proof. If one today says we have no proof of God, that person denies not only Moses, but also God, as God instructed Moses to teach these words as part of the Torah.

Saadiah Gaon (Commencing remarks from his work "Emunas v'Daos") "Blessed be God, the God of Israel, Who is alone deserving of being regarded as the Evident Truth, Who verifies with certainty unto rational beings, the existence of their souls, by means of which they access accurately what they perceive with their senses and apprehend correctly the objects of their knowledge. Uncertainties are thereby removed from them and proofs become clear. May He be lauded then above the highest commendation and praise".

Malbim (His commentary on the last three words of Haftoras Bamidbar - Hosea 2:22) "You should know God, that He revealed His signs and wonders and the dwelling of His shechina among you, until you would know God with clear knowledge as something perceived by the senses, (in order that) you should no longer require belief. Because belief is something which has no clear knowledge, (it is) simply acceptance, but they have to their knowledge to know God, which is greater than belief".

Ramban (Deut. 4:9) "For if the words of the Torah had come to us only through the mouth of Moses, even though his prophecy was verified with signs and wonders, yet 'if there were to arise in the midst of us a prophet or a dreamer of dreams' and he

were to command us to do the opposite of what the Torah commanded us, 'and he [were to] give us a sign or wonder' then a doubt would enter the people's hearts. But since the Torah reaches us from the mouth of the Almighty to our ears, and our eyes behold that there is no intermediary, we will reject anyone who differs and who casts doubt [upon the words of the Torah] and will declare him to be false."

Ramban is certain of the event at Sinai, but only due to the fact that the story of Sinai must be provable. Otherwise, a false prophet will have an equal argument that we follow him, as he has signs too. But since we have proof, "...reaches us from the mouth of the Almighty to our ears" we do not follow him.

R. Bachaya ben Josef ibn Paquda (Author of "Duties of the Heart", or "Chovas Halevavos")

Excerpts from his introduction: "Whoever has the intellectual capacity to verify what he receives from tradition, and yet is prevented from doing so by his own laziness, or because he takes lightly G-d's commandments and Torah, he will be punished for this and held accountable for negligence."

"If, however, you possess intelligence and insight, and through these faculties you are capable of verifying the fundamentals of the religion and the foundations of the commandments which you have received from the sages in the name of the prophets, then it is your duty to use these faculties until you understand the subject, so that you are certain of it - both by tradition and by force of reason. If you disregard and neglect this duty, you fall short in the fulfillment of what you owe your Creator."

Devarim 17:8-10 states: "If a case should prove too difficult for you in judgment, between blood and blood, between plea and plea, between (leprosy) mark and mark, or other matters of dispute in your courts, ...you must act in accordance with what they tell you."

Regarding this passage, Rabbi Bachaya states: "the verse does not say,.....simply accept them on the authority of Torah sages,....and rely exclusively on their tradition. Rather, (Scripture) says that you should reflect on your own mind, and use your intellect in these matters. First learn them from tradition - which covers all the commandments in the Torah, their principles and details - and then examine them with your own mind, understanding, and judgment, until the truth become clear to you, and falsehood rejected, as it is written: "Understand today and reflect on it in your heart, Hashem is the G-d in the heavens above, and on the Earth below, there is no other". (Ibid, 4:39)

Additionally in his entire Gate of Unity, R. Bachaya uses numerous proofs demonstrating the existence of a Creator and His Unity. The rabbi does not engage in mere belief. One proof I will list here:

"Chap. 1: What is the definition of the wholehearted acknowledgement of God's Unity? The accord of heart and tongue in acknowledging the unity of the Creator, after arriving at verification - through argument - of His existence and absolute oneness, by way of analysis."

Rav Hai Gaon (Academy head at Pumbedisa in Babylon) Recorded in Ramban's "Letter to the French Rabbis", 18 stanzas from the end: "However, those who devote themselves to the Torah and the fear of heaven are free from such [detrimental effects] for they undoubtedly lead the masses to a good future, and they have no dilemma about [their belief in] the Holy One, blessed be He".

Maimonides (Rambam) His first principle of the 13 Principles: "To know the existence of the Creator". His first statements in the Mishneh Torah: "The foundation of all foundations and the pillar of wisdom is to know that there is a First Cause. And He is the cause for all existences. And all that is found from the heavens and earth and what is between them do not exist except for the reality of His existence."

Rabbi Judah HaLevi (The Kuzari) Paragraph 67: "Heaven forbid that there should be anything in the Bible to contradict that which is manifest or proved!" The entire sefer the Kuzari unfolds as and endless series of proofs presented by Judah HaLevi. He uses proofs to demonstrate to the King that God exists and how He functions with man.