

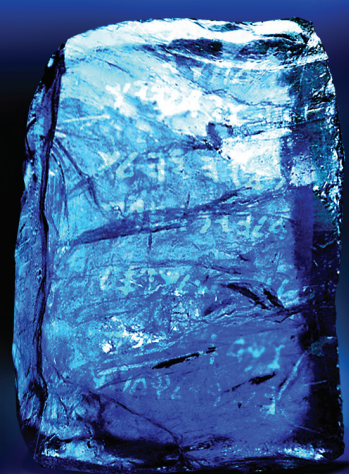
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SECRETS OF THE

BIBLE



RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM



SECRETS OF THE

BIBLE

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM



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RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

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INTRODUCTION

Some books record history, facts or theories. Others offer emotional enjoyment in their fiction, poetry or literature. But never did you find "coded messages" beyond the written word. No patterns were ever found in man-made texts revealing clues to brilliantly-hidden insights. Without prophecy, man does not possess this level of ingenuity, so no book displays such an ingenious design and additional levels of wisdom.

In contrast, the Bible is God's word. Therefore it must contain the same level of design, brilliance and depth as God's other creation...the universe. Studying the heavens, we witness a vast system of planets and stars, that expire and are reborn, with warped space charting courses and precise distances between all spheres that enables sustained life on Earth.

On Earth, harmonious systems preserve life. The abundance of air and the fluid nature of water teach us that air is most required, explaining why it is free and everywhere. Water too is essential, so it possesses the properties that enable it to flow to all regions. Man's systems of respiration, digestion and blood circulation work in perfect unison towards

the goal of maintaining health. Studying all creation reveals a plan. We can't detect this plan from a momentary snapshot, but from studying man over time, and the universe over millennia. The perfect order witnessed from heaven down to Earth bares God's fingerprints. A Designer is necessary for this grand design.

God's Bible too reveals His signature. Unlike other religions, it is not a mere book of history, personalities and laws where its message ends the written content. With proper training, we can learn the Bible's unique and astonishing method of God's concealment and disclosure of brilliant insights. Through His system of clues, repeated words, sequences of verses, chapter breaks, apparent contradictions, juxtaposition, metaphor and Biblical patterns, we detect profound questions. And by those very questions, God directs us to secrets and insights unseen on the surface. Each new Bible chapter becomes an exciting exploration into a hidden world of ideas. The examples in this book will illustrate this.

Why did God choose to conceal His lessons? Does this oppose His desire to teach man? No. God did not make His wisdom 100% hidden. Rather, He discloses it, but in a manner that requires man to engage analysis, deduction, induction, and creative thought. Had the Bible been simply a book of

facts, once we reached the last page, there would be nothing further to learn: we would possess no means for continued exploration into God's wisdom. But, as God's wisdom is not finite, He crafted an ingenious system enabling man to probe further and further, uncovering new insights year after year. This allows man to recognize — in our own small measure — God's vast wisdom. This character of wisdom's depth and breadth is part of its appeal. It engenders in man an intense awe of the Creator where we respond, "How brilliant must He be!" and propels us to study further.

King Solomon taught that wisdom requires one to dig for it: *"if as silver you seek it, and like buried treasures you search after it..."*¹ Even here there is a coded lesson. Why is silver something which one "seeks," while a treasure must be "searched"? King Solomon is equating wisdom to silver and treasures. His first lesson is that wisdom must be viewed on par with great wealth. We must possess this value of wisdom, if we are to be propelled towards searching for answers. Without this attitude, our minds will never uncover new truths.

Wisdom has a design and requires intelligence to unlock it. But there are 2 types of searches: 1) we have some intuition where the answer lies, just as one knows where to

1) Proverbs 2:4

locate silver. In this case, we must simply sustain our search; 2) at times we have less direction towards an answer, like a buried treasure. We have no map. In this case, we must work harder, "searching" is required to draw nearer to location of the answer.

The Bible's very design contains keys and clues to unlock new insights. This renders Bible study an endless journey, unlike man-made books. What's more, is that studying the Bible actually trains our minds; we advance in our abilities to think and to reason, as we become more familiar with the Bible's design and methodologies. With continued study, we detect God's purposeful clues that astound us at first, inspiring us with strong questions...but only in order to direct us towards marvels. The rewards are truly greater than gold.

After reading a few chapters, you will begin to see what I mean. My intent is to give you a true appreciation for the Bible that will set the Bible apart from all else you have read. You will distinguish between man's limited thoughts and God's brilliance. You will appreciate God's intent in giving man a religion that fills us with a unparalleled enjoyment in coming closer to God through wisdom, and seeing His Bible as truth and goodness for our souls.

This book includes selected essays I have written over the

past 15 years through the present. I feel this collection illustrates the distinct methods God employs to conceal and reveal His lessons. Essays are grouped under Metaphor, Juxtaposition and Repetition, to name a few. The essays I have included are intended to share the astonishment I experienced when uncovering these insights. I hope you experience the same amazement. May these insights direct you to apply these methods to your further study.

God's wisdom is vast. There is a lifetime of learning awaiting us, in which we will find the greatest delight, if we apply His methods to uncover His wisdom.

JUXTAPOSITION

ME

In proving that Noachides are prohibited from practicing witchcraft in addition to their other commands, Talmud Sanhedrin (59b-60a) cites Rabbi Shimon citing two Torah verses: *“A witch, one shall not let live. All who lie [sexually] with animals must certainly be killed (Exod. 22:17,18)”*. The derivation is that since the two verses form a single section (parsha) in the Torah, the two commands must be linked. That link being that since a Noachide is prohibited in sexual deviations, and this verse is grouped with witchcraft, therefore, the Noachide is also prohibited in witchcraft. Torah groups concepts precisely due to commonalities. This makes sense. But we wonder at these two verses. What commonality exists between witchcraft and bestiality, as opposed to witchcraft and other sexual violations? And what about the inverse: why is it witchcraft that God links to bestiality, as opposed to fortune-tellers, superstitions, idolatry and all other idolatrous beliefs?

The Midrash states that Adam had intercourse with all the animals, but *“Adam could not find a mate (Gen. 2:20).”* Of course this is not literal. But what is the lesson? God said, *“It is not good that man is alone (ibid 18).”* What did God mean?

The Midrash teaches that man sought a partner. However,

man's partner is not simply one that gratifies sexual needs. That is why Adam was dissatisfied with the animals. He didn't literally have intercourse with all animals: this is impossible. But it means to say that Adam recognized an essential component was missing in the animal kingdom. That component was the psychological identification with another. Animals do not possess a Tzelem Elokim – a soul. This is necessary for man's attachment to, and enjoyment with his partner.

What does this teach us about one who performs bestiality? It is clear: one desires the sexual gratification alone, without the element of identification, companionship or procreation. Such a deviant seeks to pleasure himself, and no one else. He is abnormal, as he does not seek a union with another human being. The self is the focus. It is all about "me." Part of the sexual act is that both partners desire to pleasure each other. This satisfies man psychologically, and it is a healthy emotion. But this deviant has only himself as his sole focus. Bestiality is thereby different than all other sexual deviations, as all others include two human partners. Bestiality is limited to one person. Let us now understand witchcraft.

What exactly is witchcraft, and how does it differ from all other idolatrous practices? In the base act of idolatry, one assumes a powerless object (stone, metal, animals, etc.) to

possess powers. The idolater prays or serves the idol, awaiting a positive result. A necromancer assumes he or she has contact with the dead, but it is the dead person who offers power or knowledge. The same is true of fortune-tellers: they say that certain times are fortuitous. And those who follow superstitions assume objects or events have a causal relationship, when in fact they are unrelated to the anticipated outcome. Molech is also an assumed power outside the self. In all these cases, one assumes objects have powers. But the witch is different. The witch or warlock boast that they possess powers. As a witch or warlock, “I” claim to be the cause of future events; “I” possess powers to alter nature.

We now see the unique commonality that exists in bestiality and witchcraft. In both cases, the “me” is the focus. In bestiality, the deviant sees only the self; he is seeking gratification for the self and no other. Witches and warlocks too live a life where their sense of reality is self-centered. In both cases, these deviant personalities suffers from an egomania, in which, he or she creates a reality around their sensual and psychological needs; they are the center of reality. They do not examine true reality to determine what is truth. Their sole focus is dictated by the self. And when someone lives a life where reality is dictated by ego, God is mutually excluded.

So focused on the self are these two personalities, that their lives are no longer justified. Both must be killed. And they are not killed for idolatrous or sexual violations per se, but for the corruption of the soul that is generated by such an attachment to the self. I thank my brother Brett for this keen insight.

Maimonides teaches that one must seek a life where one is equidistant from both poles in all emotional spectrums. One must not be greedy, or a spendthrift...but generous to a point. One must not be a glutton or fasting at all times, but enjoy food moderately. But when it comes to ego, Maimonides teaches that one must never cave into that emotion, but always refrain and be humble. Maimonides teaches that the ego plays no role in our serving God. One who follows the dictates of the ego to this degree, opposes the purpose of human life, where we are to recognize God, and not the self.

This insight, I find most unique, for it further defines two prohibitions in the categories of idolatry and sexual prohibitions, normally viewed as just other deviations of the “same kind.” It unveils a new facet of human nature. And with this recognition, we may now detect other Torah violations committed because we tend to view the “me” as the sole focus.

PHARAOH'S WISDOM

After Pharaoh sees the undeniable brilliance of Joseph², Pharaoh selects Joseph to be his second in command over Egypt. The passage states three ideas, 1) Pharaoh changes Joseph's name to Zaphnas Paneach, 2) he gives Asnas, the daughter of Poti-Phera (now subtly referred to as "Priest" of Ohn) to Joseph as his wife, and 3) Joseph goes out on Egypt (to rule).

We have a mesora – a tradition – that when one verse (pasuk) contains many points, they must all be related, as God intentionally grouped all those points in one verse. We then have the following questions:

1) What is the connection between all the points in this passage? 2) Why give Joseph the daughter of Poti-Phera? His wife accused Joseph of attempted rape! Wasn't there a better choice of a mate, if he must have a wife? 3) Why is Poti-Phera suddenly referred to as a "priest"? 4) Why is Joseph "going out on Egypt" significant? 5) Why does Pharaoh change Joseph's name to Zaphnas Paneach? With a little consideration, the answers leap from this passage.

Pharaoh was in his position, and not without intelligence.

Upon summoning Joseph from prison to interpret his dreams,

2) Gen. 41:45

Pharaoh was cognizant of the future political problems faced with elevating an imprisoned Hebrew to viceroy status. More to the point, Pharaoh was appointing an alien slave accused of raping a countryman's wife. This would not go well with his subjects, or his country. How would Pharaoh deal with this?

I believe with the following answer, we unveil insight into Pharaoh's wisdom.

Pharaoh attempted to dispel any rumors of Joseph's ill repute by giving him this specific woman for a wife. Who in their right minds would believe that Joseph attempted rape of a woman, the wife of Poti-Phera, and then marries her very daughter? Pharaoh caused Egypt to believe that the rape accusation was false. Further, Poti-Phera's wife could no longer accuse Joseph, as any accusation would bring shame to her daughter, and to herself.

In addition to silencing the wife of Poti-Phera, Pharaoh sought to silence Poti-Phera himself about Joseph's alleged rape attempt. What do people desire more than anything else? More than money? Power. Pharaoh again displayed his cunning by granting a status of priest to Poti-Phera, in exchange for his silence. At first, Poti-Phera was not referred to in the verses as a "priest." This is changed afterwards to silence him. Finally, Pharaoh's changing of Joseph's name was

an attempt to transform his Hebrew slave reputation, into an Egyptian veneer. One's name creates a perceived status.

We now see how these ideas are all connected, and why God grouped them into one passage. All of the elements in this passage aim towards Pharaoh's one goal of concealing Joseph's alleged wrongdoings. But what about "*Joseph going out on Egypt?*" What is the lesson? I believe it is to show that regardless of Pharaoh's success in rendering Joseph into a leader acceptable by the Egyptians, Joseph never shed his identity as "Joseph the Righteous." It was still "Joseph" who went out onto Egypt, and not the fabricated, Egyptian veneer "Zaphnas Paneach" created by Pharaoh.

It is enlightening to see the precision of the Torah; how it is written so sparingly. Just enough information is revealed to suggest the problem, and just enough for the answer. It is brilliant that those very statements, which cause the problem, are in fact, clues to the answer.

CATEGORIES

THE 10 COMMANDMENTS: UNCOVERING ITS CODE

The last sections in Exodus focus on the Tabernacle, the Temple. At the center of the Temple is the Ark that houses the 10 Commandments. It is therefore crucial to understand the message of these tablets, if we are to grasp the essence of Temple. Do these tablets contain mere commands alone, or is there something deeper?

At the conclusion of his lengthy commentary³, Ibn Ezra quotes Saadia Gaon stating that the 10 Commandments are the main categories for the remaining Torah commands. Perhaps this categorization explains the need for the 10 Commandments: as God desired that the Jewish nation would view all post-Sinaitic commands as Divine, validation was required that future commands did not stem from Moses' own thinking. That proof would be that the future commands fit into a framework already given by God: the 10 Commandments. That Moses did not deviate from God, and that he presented only God's words and not his own fabrications, God created a separate miracle that Moses' face shone literal beams of light. Such a miracle displayed God's endorsement of Mo-

3) Exod. 20:1, just before commencing his commentary on 20:3

ses as he taught the remaining laws through their wilderness travels. All post-Sinaitic commands are God's commands, not something Moses developed on his own.

It is also appropriate that we reiterate the miraculous letters forming the 10 Commandments. The Torah states they were seen from both sides of these translucent sapphire bricks. This means that the letters formed naturally inside the sapphire as it formed over time since creation. The letters were not subsequently carved into the surface of the sapphire, which would not attest to anything more than human craft. For letters to form within the sapphire's grain is impossible, unless it was God's will. Thus, the tablets' writing, and the tablets themselves displayed divine creation. Let us now return to the tablets' words...

The 10 Commandments teach not only important concepts, but they also prioritize the commands. Ibn Ezra explains our relationship with God is based more on our thoughts than on our actions. However, regarding man, our actions are more vital than our thoughts: bodily harm is of greater concern than our speech or thoughts. It is for this reason that in the 10 Commandments, the first five commands which deal with man's relationship with God commence with laws govern-

ing thought, then speech and finally with action. The order is reversed with the second set of commands, which commences with laws governing action, then speech, and finally thought (see the table below where T=Thought, S=Speech, and A=Action):

The First Tablet of the 10 Commandments: Laws Between Man and God:

1. Know God Exists(T)
2. Do Not Commit Idolatry(T)
3. Don't Use God's Name in Vain(S)
4. Keep the Sabbath(A)
5. Honor Your Parents(A)

The Second Tablet of the 10 Commandments: Laws Between Man and Man:

6. Do Not Kill(A)
7. Do Not Commit Adultery(A)
8. Do No Kidnap(A)
9. Do Not Swear Falsely(S)
10. Do Not Desire a Friend's Wife(T)

All of man's actions fall into one of these three categories: thought, speech and action. When we say that man's primary relationship with God is via thought, this is because God is not physical. Thus, our relationship with Him cannot be a physical relationship. We relate to God with our thoughts and convictions, and therefore our knowledge of Him is most vital. This explains why the first command – the most vital command – is knowledge of God. From here, the remaining 4 commands decrease in their importance, although they are all fundamentals. However, human relationships are primarily physical. Therefore, the worst crimes are those when bodily harm occurs. Murder is therefore in position 1 of the second Tablet. What one thinks regarding others is of the least importance and therefore, not desiring a friend's wife is last in the second Tablet.

We understand the need for the 10 Commandments as an outline for all Torah laws, as suggested above. However, what consideration demanded such categorization, that the 10 Commandments be separated into two groups; that laws between man and God should precede and laws between man and man; and that each group be ordered by priority? Clearly, God did not simply present Moses with laws. He also gave

a precise system. What that system is can be uncovered by answering these questions.

In general, what is the purpose of categories? If one assumes the law to dress in one's finest clothes for the Sabbath is for self-aggrandizement, he misses the purpose of that law. But if he realizes this law targets a greater respect for the Sabbath, he is now on the path to understand the true purpose. Dressing with one's best clothes on Sabbath intends to generate the greatest respect for the day. Then one must categorize or define the essence of the Sabbath. If one thinks it is merely a day to rest, he again focuses on the self, and not God. But if he understands that the purpose of the Sabbath is to recall creation, then one is on the path to recognize the Creator, the true purpose of the Sabbath. Additionally, when one sees that the observance of the Sabbath is placed in the first tablet – laws between man and God – this enhances his appreciation that Sabbath is about God. Thus, proper categorization offers us greater truths.

Defining a framework of 10 commands is the highest level of categorization. Separating between laws that apply to God and to man is another categorization. Prioritizing those two sets of laws is a third category.

To possess the highest level of knowledge concerning any law, one must first know the law's objective: simple performance is clearly inadequate. One must discern if a law targets greater knowledge of God, or if it addresses insecurities through superstitious and idolatrous acts, seeking to secure one's future. Meaning, does the law at hand fall under command #1 or #2 in the set of laws between man and God? Knowing the proper category also better directs our studies.

If I misconstrue that laws prohibiting alien religious practice exist simply to prevent intermarriage, I forfeit its true purpose. Intermarriage is a social phenomenon. When in fact, laws against alien practices ultimately intend to teach us that God is one.

Ideas concerning God are more vital than ideas about man. This explains why laws between man and God precede laws between man and man. As our purpose in life is not primarily social but to engage our intellect and study God, intermarriage is not as vital as idolatry. Furthermore, our social or physical existence is temporary while our souls endure eternally, again displaying how our eternal relationship with God outweighs our temporary relationship with man. And even while alive, many hours of our day we might be isolated from others, while we are never isolated from God.

We now appreciate why laws between man and God precede laws between man and man. We also understand why 10 categories of laws were given, since categorization is vital to arriving at greater knowledge. But why were the 10 Commandments given in a hierarchical order, as quoted by Ibn Ezra above?

Knowledge is built on prerequisite understanding. The simplest example is that without understanding words, we cannot understand a sentence. Without sentences, we cannot understand a story. Similarly, without understanding what God is, command #1, we cannot grasp the prohibition of using God's name in vain, command #3. We must first grasp the gravity of the existence of a First Cause for all existences, before we can appreciate the respect due to Him. Thus, the commands are not ordered by importance alone, but this order of importance relates to a logical prioritization.

The 10 Commandments offer many vital lessons:

- 1) They validate all post-Sinaitic laws as Divine in origin.
- 2) Two tablets convey the distinction between two areas of knowledge: truths concerning God, and social laws that serve only to secure societies, so we can all study God.
- 3) These 10 categories intend to direct us to apply cat-

egorization in our studies, so we might attain most accurate truths.

4) The prioritization of one law before the following law teaches that knowledge is a building process: more fundamental knowledge is the foundation for other areas.

As categorization is so crucial to acquiring truth, our greatest thinkers apply this methodology. Maimonides commences his Mishneh Torah with “Fundamentals”, and Aristotle commences with his “Categories.”

God granted man intelligence. He designed our minds to work in a certain manner. He then gave us His Torah, initially with the 10 Commandments, as a tool bearing a design that not only imparts facts, but by its very design, represents the system of acquiring knowledge.

METAPHOR

HAVE WE FOUND THE GARDEN OF EDEN?

Genesis contains many themes. The topics of my inquiry are limited to the Garden of Eden, the Tree of Knowledge and the Tree of Life, the snake, man's sin, God's punishments, and God's plan which will emerge from understanding the elements just cited.

To commence, what was God's purpose in giving Adam and Eve a command? God specifically states that man can eat of "all" the trees of the Garden of Eden. But of the Tree of Knowledge of good and evil, man must not eat...the punishment being mortality. This teaches that Adam had complete permissiveness, barring one fruit tree. God permitted all vegetation to man, except one fruit. What was this precise plan? Also, why was the punishment that man would become mortal? God apparently offered Adam to choose between obeying God and retaining his immortality. Or, if he disobeyed through unrestrained physical gratification by eating of the Tree of Knowledge of good and evil, he would sacrifice his immortality.

Interesting...there are two accounts of Creation: the first account is the Six Days and the second is man in the Garden of Eden. We notice that the prohibition on eating the fruit is

found in the second account of Creation. How is this account different than the Six Days of Creation recorded earlier? What new category of Creation is God describing? There are other details, such as the river that exited Eden and became four “heads.” Mirroring the beginning of Genesis, King Solomon too, in the beginning of Koheles also discusses “*water flowing.*” Is King Solomon duplicating God’s lessons outlined in Genesis? God places man in the Garden of Eden twice (Gen. 2:8, 2:15). Why this duplication? In the first instance (2:7,8) man is described as “*dust from the Earth*” and that God “*blew into his nostrils a living soul, and man became a living being. And God planted a garden in the east of Eden and He placed there the man whom He formed*”...a physical description. Whereas in the second placement of man in Eden, God omits any details of man’s form. Why is God placing Adam in Eden two times? Maimonides briefly discusses this:

Another noteworthy saying is this: “And the Lord God took the man, i.e., raised him, and placed him in the Garden of Eden,” i.e., He gave him rest. The words “He took him, He gave him” have no reference to position in space, but they indicate his position in rank among transient beings, and the prominent character of his existence.⁴

4) The Guide for the Perplexed, book II chap. xxx, p 217 Friedlander paperback

THE TREES OF LIFE AND KNOWLEDGE

The Tree of Life and the Tree of Knowledge are not mentioned in Genesis 1:29, when God first describes the permitted trees of fruit; it is only here in this second account of Creation, and Adam's second placement (omitting a description of Adam's physical form) that God prohibits the Tree of Knowledge. This is significant. "Eden" sounds similar to "Adam." Any hint here? And why are these two trees "*in the center of Eden*" (Gen. 2:9)? What are these two trees, and why must they both exist? God does not prohibit Adam from eating of the Tree of Life...until he ate of the Tree of Knowledge. Why? And if God is concerned man will eat from the Tree of Life, why cannot God simply destroy it? Why does God, instead, create the "*cherubim and the flaming spinning sword to guard the path to Tree of Life*" (Gen. 4:24)? What are these two entities?

THE SNAKE

What was God's purpose in creating a snake, an animal "*more cunning than all other beasts of the field*"? This creature caused the sin. Why was it necessary?

EVE'S SIN

What precisely was Eve's sin? God tells us what Eve responds in her thoughts: "*the tree was good to eat, it was visually desirable, the tree was enticing for understanding...*(Gen. 1:6)" Where else in Genesis are we told of something being "good?" What is God sharing with us here?

THE SNAKE'S "RIDER"

Further, Maimonides teaches that it was not the snake, but its "rider" that enticed Eve.⁵ What is this rider? Maimonides states this rider was Samael. In Hebrew, Samael means blind from seeing God (*sama-el*). Maimonides further states that just as Samael has a meaning, the Hebrew term for snake, "nachash" has a meaning. What is Maimonides' message?

Why does God record Adam's blame of Eve, and her blame of the snake? What is this lesson God sees so essential for us to learn?

What is meant by God's punishing the snake? And what is the justice in God's punishments to Adam and Eve? Let's begin to answer these chapters...

5) ibid

DETECTING THE CLUES

Let's focus on a few of our observations, and elucidate them.

1) Maimonides said the snake has a "rider"...but the Torah text does not mention any rider.

2) Maimonides calls this rider "Samael" and then says Samael and the instincts are the same being:

The serpent had a rider, the rider was as big as a camel, and it was the rider that enticed Eve: this rider was Samael." Samael is the name generally applied by our Sages to Satan. Thus they say in several places that Satan desired to entice Abraham to sin, and to abstain from binding Isaac, and he desired also to persuade Isaac not to obey his father. At the same time they also say, in reference to the same subject, viz., the Akedah (the binding of Isaac), that Samael came to Abraham and said to him, "What! Hast thou, being an old man, lost thy senses?" This shows that Samael and Satan are identical.⁶

6) Guide for the Perplexed, book II, chap xxx

3) God places man in the Garden twice. How can that be? And only the first placing refers to man in his physical form. What does this say about the second placing?

4) There are two accounts of creation, the second is introduced as, "*These are the products of the heavens and earth... (Gen. 2:4).*" This section goes on to explain the behaviors or laws of vegetation, and then discusses man...as if saying, man too is discussed in his own productions, or behaviors.

5) A river is described that flows out of Eden and divides into four "heads." Since when is a river called a head? One river called Pishon encompassed all of the land of Chavila, where there was "good" gold. Of what concern is this, and why state this here? After concluding the rivers, God places man a second time in Eden. As if to say, only now can we address man...but the man with no reference to his physical form. Which man is this?

6) There must be deeper meaning behind a literal spinning, flaming sword, and cherubim...and also why God didn't simply destroy the two trees...

TWO ACCOUNTS OF CREATION

Creation had two parts: 1) creation of physical entities from nothingness, and 2) creation of their governing laws. When commencing Koheles, King Solomon says, *“All the rivers go to the sea, but the sea is not full, to the place where the rivers go, there they return to go (1:7).”* A wise Rabbi explained that the king was first educating us on how man’s psyche works. Man has energies that “flow,” but man is rarely satisfied, or “full.” Man seeks accomplishments, novelty, happiness, success, and many other emotions. God and King Solomon commenced both books, Genesis and Koheles with lessons on human nature. For if we are to appreciate God’s Torah guide to human life, and king Solomon’s studies in happiness, we must first know the subject of these books, that being man’s internal makeup. Only once we recognize our natures, can we appreciate the rest of His Torah and how each law benefits us. Torah is not to perfect our mortal bodies, but our immortal souls.

Just as God commenced the second account of Creation with a description of how plants behave, and that same account refers to man, this suggests that God is describing man’s behaviors as well. This theory finds support that man’s

sin is recorded, and also God's second placing of man, which does not make sense literally since man is already there in Eden.

Furthermore, in the second account of man being "placed in Eden", God omits man's physical description. This leaves only Adam's non-physical components to somehow be termed as "placed." As Maimonides stated, *"This has no reference to position in space, but indicate his position in rank among transient beings, and the prominent character of his existence."* Therefore, this account is not discussing a location of man, but man's internal design. God does place the real, physical Adam in Eden, *"And He blew into his nostrils a living soul, and man became a living being. And God planted a garden in the east of Eden and He placed there the man whom He formed (2:7,8)."* But then in 2:15 God placed man in Eden again. Here, it is not the physical man placed at a location, but God is "placing" man in a certain state of being, for no reference is made to man's physical form.

As a wise Rabbi said, "Man lives in his mind" or in his head. As is true in Koheles, the river in Genesis too indicates man's energies that flow toward various lifestyles, or "four heads."

A primary human drive is success. Man's energies first flow to Pishon, which encompassed a land called Chavila (when

changed from vav to vais) means bundles. This land contained gold that was “good.” But gold cannot be good, that is a moral value. Gold is either pure or impure. However, God is teaching that man’s primary drive, what he values as “good”, is wealth. Eve too said the tree was “good to eat.” Man “encompasses” this bundling of wealth; he is quite attached to it. We are thereby taught that for man to pursue anything, he must value it as a “good.” Eve too had to justify her violation, calling the fruit “good.” We are also taught that bundling, or heaping up wealth, is a fundamental attraction of wealth. Thus, King Solomon teaches, *“One who loves wealth will not be satisfied with wealth... (Koheles 5:9).”* This is because the drive is not to attain a fixed amount; rather, it is the process of “amassing” or “bundling” for which one yearns. We witness many wealthy people who cannot cease from piling up more and more, despite their inability to spend even a fraction of what they have attained.

Other people are driven by desires, to satiate their senses and fill their bellies. Gichone was the second river, and it means belly. It encompasses the land of Cush, and *chush* means the senses. The third river flows toward Ashur, and *ashray* means happiness. Other people long to simply be carefree and happy without conflicts; wealth and lusts are

not their objective. They prefer instead a simple pain-free life. The energies of Adam flow towards many drives.

EDEN: A BLUEPRINT OF MAN

God wishes mankind to know why we were not initially created with a conscience, morality. It was due to our inability to follow God's commands without it. Had God created Adam and Eve at the outset, including a conscience (the cause of man's shame of his nakedness) we would question its necessity. As God's wish for man is to engage our intellect – the one gift man possesses over all other creatures – we could engage our intellects and ponder the marvels of creation to a far greater degree, if not burdened with concerns for moral choices. We would declare it unjust to be burdened with this extra faculty. However, now that God recorded the account of man's sin, we appreciate that the conscience was actually a much needed gift.

Adam was without a conscience; he viewed his nakedness as nothing different than a tree. It was simply a fact, with no moral value attached to it. He was initially enabled to have his mind 100% free to explore creation and uncover God's beautiful laws. He had no concerns about moral issues to

cloud scientific inquiry. But God gave him one command. The command was so slight. He could enjoy literally all trees of the garden, except one. But Eve became fixated on satisfying her drives, instead of retaining immortal life in the Garden. Adam too succumbed to this desire. Both man and woman demonstrated their inability to abide by even the most minute limitation.

This is the lesson for mankind: man seeks unbridled gratification, even at the cost of his mortality. This is how powerful our instincts are. By gifting man and woman with a new faculty – the conscience – we now have one additional chance to abstain from sin. We now feel guilt, a new emotion. Adam and Eve hid once they ate, feeling ashamed of their nakedness. This shame can be applied to any wrongdoing, assisting us in refraining from self-destructive actions. So we appreciate that God initially created man without morality, which diverts our energies from worldly scientific study, towards internal conflicts. But this diversion was necessary, if we are to abstain from sin, and earn continued life.

God also converted man from immortal, to mortal. Man's attachment to the physical gratifications is now severely curbed due to our recognition of our limited time on this planet. Mortality is the perfect response to a being seeking

unlimited earthy gratification, like Adam. Mortality diverts us somewhat back towards Adam's state prior to the sin: a being focusing less on gratification and more on God's wisdom.

God's plan was that man invest all his energies into pursuing wisdom as this will offer him the greatest satisfaction. To redirect man back to this lofty goal, God created the conscience so as to slow us down before violating His will, and He also made us mortal, so we are less attached to this physical world. Coming to terms with our limited stay here, we are better equipped to focus on what is truly eternal, and that is God and His wisdom.

The greatest good was not taken from Adam and Eve. They could have lived eternally in Eden, had they remained on the path of naming the animals and other pursuits of wisdom. But now as mortals, this eternal attachment to wisdom will occur only in the afterlife.

Regarding man's other punishments, man sought unbridled gratification, and therefore God cursed man with thorns and thistles, and farming his daily bread. Meaning, he would no longer find complete satisfaction when seeking physical gratification: food takes toil to attain, things rot, metal rusts, and we find aggravation in our daily tasks. Man is preoccupied with farming or work, and less energies are available to

sin. All this is a blessing, to redirect our energies away from physical gratification, and towards the world of wisdom.

Eve dominated Adam in her act of causing his sin, and was therefore made subservient to man to a degree to correct this. She was made to be absorbed emotionally with birth pangs, difficult pregnancy and child rearing. This too disengages her from dominating man.

ADAM & EVE CAST BLAME

When confronted by God after they sinned, both man and woman shifted blame from themselves. Although a “great intellect”⁷ Adam did not readily accept responsibility for his sin. Maimonides states there is meaning in the word “*nachash*”, snake. *Nichush* is the same word and refers to superstition; a false imagined reality which man wrongly accepts as equal to what his senses detect. Eve created her own reality, despite the snake’s deception. It was Eve, not the snake, that caused her sin: “*the tree was good to eat, it was visually desirable, the tree was enticing for understanding...(Gen. 3:6)*” Her powerful emotions and imagination, termed by Maimonides as the “rider on the snake” are to blame. “Rider” means that

7) Ibn Ezra describes man as a “*chocham gadol*” – a great intellect (Gen. 2:16)

there was something other than the snake that caused her sin. This something, was imagination. The snake deceives Eve, and Eve is blinded by her own fantasies, what Maimonides stated earlier is identical with Samael, that which “blinds one from God.” Eve’s imagination blinded her.

Now, as the snake was closely tied to Eve’s sin, although a real creature, Sforno suggests it also embodies the working of the instincts. God curses the real snake, but simultaneously teaches us the modifications He now makes in man’s instincts: the instincts will now “*go on their belly and eat dust (Gen. 3:14).*” Meaning, God slowed the movement of our instinctual drives and also made our attainment of our lusts as distasteful as eating dust. These two measures minimize gratification in the attainment of physical desires, helping us again to redirect our energies towards wisdom. But God curses the snake further, “*Man will crush your head, and you will bruise his heel (Gen. 3:15).*” This occurs literally, but there is an additional lesson as Maimonides states:

*More remarkable still is the way in which the serpent is joined to Eve, or rather his seed to her seed; the head of the one touches the heel of the other. Eve defeats the serpent by crushing its head, whilst the serpent defeats her by wounding her heel.*⁸

8) Guide for the Perplexed, book II, chap xxx.

Man defeats his instincts by crushing it at the “head” of the battle. Only if we thwart our emotional urges upon their very onset, do we succeed over them. But if we allow our emotions to swell, they eventually become too powerful to defeat, and the instincts defeats us in the “heel” of the battle.

Man still shifted the blame after the sin, and did not confess he caved to his instincts. God records both Adam and Eve shifting the blame, to teach us that they were less in touch with their internal words, despite God’s efforts in creating a snake that they could use as a model of their instincts, to apply to themselves.

EDEN’S TWO TREES

Eden has two primary trees, I say primary, as God placed them in the “center” of the garden. Center denotes prominence. At the center of man’s psyche is his feeling of immortality. It is this feeling of permanence that enables us the fortitude to progress in life. If death were a reality, we would live a morbid existence. King Solomon says *“And also the world [God] planted in man’s heart (Koheles 3:11).”* God saw it necessary that man feel a sense of immortality, as if eternity were planted in his heart. The Tree of Life is appropriately named.

As man was immortal before his sin, he had no urge to eat of this tree. It would do nothing for him. The tree alluded to what is in the core of man's psyche. Only once he was sentenced with mortality did this tree have any appeal, as God says:

So it is, man has become as one of us to know good and evil, and now perhaps he will send his hand and take the Tree of Life and eat and live forever (Gen. 3:22).

Man sinned, and due to his sentence of mortality, man will deny this mortality. It was very disturbing, and so he yearned to recapture his immortality. God could not destroy the Tree of Life, as this would mean God is removing from man his vital sense of being, of enjoying life for a while. God did not want man to live a morbid existence. He desired man to retain some sense of permanence on Earth. The solution is that man retain some sense of immortality, but also guard him from investing too much of his energies into a temporal Earthly existence. This balance was struck by giving man some realization of his mortality, while also allowing him to feel a sense of youth, expressed as an unapproachable, spinning flaming sword and the childlike cherubim that guarded the path to the Tree of Life.

At his center, man possesses two faculties or counsels (etz). Man is essentially a moral being, and a mortal being. The Etz Hachaim and Etz Hadaas, the Trees of Life and Knowledge, are in the center of the Garden of Eden.

SUMMARY

Man is complex. Our psyche contains energies that flow towards many lifestyles. We live without realizing our instinctual urges, to which we succumb after some time of conflict with them. Underlying all our imaginations and plans, are feelings of morality, immortality and a need to accomplish. Many of us ignore or even deny this internal world. Yet, we must know about it, confront it, and manage it, if we are to succeed and live based on reason, not our instincts. The Torah is our guide to navigate this course in life, informing us of values and actions our Creator deems most beneficial, and from what we must steer clear. Ultimately, we must choose between our drives and our intellects. We can.

The Garden of Eden is on Earth. Yet, it paralleled many lessons for understanding what type of creatures we are, providing us insight unavailable on the surface.

THE SOUND OF GOD IN THE GARDEN

...and she took of its fruit and ate, and also fed her husband with her and he ate. And the two of them, their eyes opened and they understood they were naked and they seamed fig leaves and made for themselves garments. And they heard the voice of God traveling in the garden at the wind of the day, and they hid, man and his wife, because of God was in the midst of the trees of the garden. And God called to the man and said to him, "Where are you?" And man said, "I heard Your voice in the garden and I was afraid, for I am naked and so I hid." And [God] said, "Who told you that you are naked; have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat?" And the man said, "The woman you have given with me, she gave me from the tree and I ate." And God said to the woman, "What is this you have done?" And the woman said, "The snake caused me to err and I ate (Gen. 3:6-13)."

God then punished the snake, then the woman, and then man. However, my focus is on the verses above, what oc-

curred prior to the punishments. After eating the forbidden fruit, Adam and Eve “*heard God’s voice moving in the Garden*” ...and they heard this “*at the wind of the day (Gen. 3:8).*”

There are many questions:

1) Did they truly hear a voice? If so, what was God saying? The verse does not teach of any words or communication.

2) What is the significance of hearing God at “the wind of the day”?

3) Why repeat God was in the garden, but add “in the midst of the trees”?

4) Why is God’s voice only mentioned “after” the sin?

5) God questions Eve after Adam blames her, and God then punishes the snake when Eve blames it. Why does God seem to accept Adam’s blame on Eve, then accept Eve’s blame on the snake?

6) Why do they both shift the blame?

7) God does tell Cain about his inner world, that he can rule over it. Why does God not warn Adam and Eve prior to their sin?

We first learn that subsequent to the sin, the man and the woman received new knowledge, taught by the words “*their eyes were opened.*” From the very commencement of this Torah section, metaphor is employed, as “opened eyes” truly

refers to knowledge, not to the moving of one's eyelids. Thus, other metaphors may be included.

The "*wind of the day*" is literal, referring to the dimming of daylight, at dusk, when the winds pick up.⁹ But here is the lesson... During the transition of daylight to darkness, a contrast presents itself to man. This caused man to distinguish, and reflect on both parts of the day. He then reviewed his actions; man reflected on his disobedience. Ibn Ezra says this means they repented. God was going to keep His word of punishment. Man recognized God would be "coming for him" in the garden. Man felt remorse, and this remorse shortly followed man's sense of nakedness. Remorse is part of the newly-born faculty of morality granted to man once he sinned. This morality is intended to offer man a secondary system of abstinence from sin. If reason alone would not stop man from sinning, hopefully a sense of right and wrong will. Subsequent to the sin, the man and the woman received a new awareness, a conscience, which they did not possess previously. This explains why they were ashamed of their nakedness.

As the day subsided, man reflected, and with his new conscience, he then sensed his error conveyed as "hearing a voice." Voice does not refer only to words, but also to "under-

9) Ibn Ezra, Gen. 3:8

standing.” Similarly at Sinai, Maimonides teaches the Jews heard no words, only a voice or a sound, based on the verse “a voice of matters you heard (*Deut. 4:12*).”

In the Garden, God was not speaking, as we see no message recorded. Nor can God be located anywhere; neither in heaven, on Earth, nor “in” the garden. Hearing a voice in the garden means that man understood he violated God, Who knows all man’s actions, as if He is “in the garden,” and Who will now exact punishment.

SIN AND DENIAL OF GOD

*And they hid, man and his wife, because of God was
in the midst of the trees of the garden.*

Notice in the second half of that verse, God is viewed as amidst the “trees” of the garden, not simply “in the garden” as in the first half of the verse. “*Amidst the trees of the garden*” conveys that God is aware of his trees, including the forbidden tree which now is missing some of its fruits.

This teaches a fundamental lesson: until they sinned, man and woman were not contemplating that they stood before God at all times. God was not “in the garden” while they

sinned. Sin requires a denial of God and that He is watching. One cannot sin if he feels he is before God. This explains why man only contemplated God “after” the sin. King Solomon teaches “*at all times let your garments be white (Koheles 9:8).*” The king means that one should abstain from sin (stained garments) at all times. And this, Pirkei Avos teaches is achieved if we recognize that God records all. But man and woman were able to deny God’s presence, just as anyone must do today when he or she sins.

More startling is the Torah’s method of conveying man’s mindset subsequent to sin. It is described as “*God going in the garden*” – a phenomenon external to man. Similarly, both man and woman blame another party when God inquired of their sin. And even God initially follows suit, seeming to initially accept their blame by seeking a response from the accused party: man blamed woman, and God turns to her and inquires from her. The woman blames the snake, and God turns and addresses the snake. Man and woman are punished after this, but at first, God entertains their blame. These acts of blame are significant enough that God records them in His Torah. And again, God also records man subsequent to sin, as hearing “*God going in the garden,*” a literal phenomenon, instead of describing man’s remorse. This is

compounded by God being “*amidst the trees of the garden.*”

What is this lesson?

But even with his remorse, man does not yet repent until God calls out to him, “*Where are you?*” God allows man to believe he has successfully hid himself, just as God asked Cain where Abel is, and asked Bilam “*Who are these men?*” The Rabbis teach God does this so as not to suddenly accuse man, which would be too stressful. And even when Adam replies, he does not confess his sin, but says he was hiding due to his nakedness. It is only after God inquires if he did eat the forbidden fruit, that man confessed to the act, and even so, he still blames the woman.

In contrast to man and woman where God does not warn them prior to sinning, we find God does in fact warn Cain before he murders his brother.¹⁰ Furthermore, God informs Cain that he can rule over his desire to sin. Here, there is an identification of the part of man that sins, as separate from man himself. Was Cain – and not his parents – warned due to his young age, or due to his greater self-awareness of his internal world (instincts), or was he perhaps different in human design than his parents? I can only speculate, but my speculation is in line with an idea I heard years back...

10) Ibn Ezra, Gen. 3:8

The answer to all these questions might be found in the difference in design between the first man and woman, and all subsequent people. Until they sinned, the instinctual drive was not an internal part of their makeup. Before the sin, it was only when man saw his wife, that he was sexually aroused. Otherwise, he was too engaged in wisdom, that his imagination would not naturally flow towards his instincts without external stimuli, as our instincts work today. Today, our imagination is strong, and is attached to our instincts from youth, as God says, "*For the inclination of man's heart is evil from youth (Gen. 8:21).*" This means there was a change from Adam and Eve, to all their descendants. Adam and Eve did not possess an internalized instinctual drive. This is difficult for us to imagine, since all we know is our own makeup; our feelings have always been part of us. It is hard to grasp what we would be like if we didn't have internal urges and a strong imagination. Yet, this was the state of man prior to sin.

This would explain why after the sin man viewed the "external world" as different, as "God moving in the garden", and not viewing himself as different (internal workings to blame). Adam did not yet recognize this new, internal part of his nature. This explains why he blamed the woman, why she

blamed the snake, and why God accepted their blame. For they had not yet grasped the change in their psychological makeup. Therefore, they only recognized the external world, and felt justified to blame something else for their sin. This is significant, so God records their blame. God also momentarily accepted their blame as they were as of yet, not ready to appreciate their new makeup. However, Cain was born with the instincts, and could understand God's warning to control his internal urges. This is why God warns Cain, but not his parents.

Whichever explanation one accepts, we must appreciate God's inclusion of the details of this story, the many questions, and the significance of God recording the fact that man felt "God was in the Garden." The fact the Torah does not share any words of "God's voice", adds support that there was in fact no voice, but that this conveys a different idea, as we stated.

MENORAH: A MAP OF THE UNIVERSE?

Unlike other religions toting arbitrarily-designed ceremonial objects and garb, and tapestries that express raw human fantasy, each of God's Torah laws and designs are precise, containing fundamental intellectual and moral truths.

Of all the Temple's vessels, the Menorah is most perplexing. As Einstein would not dismiss any order detected in the universe, we too cannot dismiss the Menorah's intricate details. With them, God intends to share something profound with mankind. While some details may be technical, patient study of the Menorah is rewarded with new insights and increased appreciation for God's design and purpose of this mitzvah, and of man. Without understanding the Menorah's designs and laws, we miss His intended lessons. Let us first identify the unique features of the Menorah, and then progress in an orderly manner to define those features. While there is much room for *drash* and allegory, it is vital for the sake of arriving at the true lessons of Menorah, that we do not overstep, or suggest ideas that are not loyal to Menorah's designs and laws.

MENORAH'S DESIGN

Unlike most other vessels, the Menorah was made of pure gold, like the Ark's cover. Both could not be made in parts, and then subsequently assembled. They were both hammered into their final form from a single block of gold. Why? Iconic to Menorah is its six branches emanating from a center seventh branch: three branches protruded from both sides, left and right, totaling six protruding branches, plus a seventh center stem. Why do the six branches emanate from the seventh; not standing on the ground independently, on six separate bases, just like the seventh stem? On top of all seven branches was a basin for the oil. The wicks of all six branches faced towards the center stem: those on the right faced left, and those wicks on the left faced right. And the direction of the center stem's wick faced towards the Holy of Holies. Why? On each of the six branches were unusual designs: three cups, one flower and one sphere. On the center stem there was an additional cup, three additional spheres (out of which the six branches protruded), one additional set of a flower, cup and sphere, and finally one more flower at the base. The base had three legs.

We readily understand Moses' perplexity of the Menorah's design, that is, until God showed him a vision of it. We too wonder what these cups, flowers and spheres mean. And why were there more cups, than flowers and spheres? But the near duplication of design on all seven branches must teach something. And the seventh's additional designs too teach another lesson. Furthermore, a miracle occurred that the center stem's wick burned unnaturally longer than the other six branches.¹¹ What was the need for this miracle? What is that lesson? In general, what is Menorah: a lamp? The Talmud states that God does not need light, for He lit our journey through the desert! King Solomon sought to highlight this unnecessary need for light precisely by designing the Temple's windows narrow on the inside, and wider on the outside¹². Menorah was not for the purpose of light. Now, let's proceed to answer this enigma, step-by-step...

WHAT IS LIGHT?

"Nare mitzvah, v'Torah Or – A (single) flame is a command, and Torah is light (Proverbs, 6:22)." Here, King Solomon alluded to a primary metaphor: wisdom is likened to light. Furthermore,

11) Menachot 86b

12) Kings I, 6:4, Menachot 86b

the wisdom of one mitzvah illuminates to “some” degree: a command is equated to one flame. While observing Torah entirely, removes all darkness. It is “light.” It is only with a broad understanding attained through observing “all” of Torah, that we see the truth in all areas, as if one walks in broad daylight. The Menorah, then, is not for God, as He needs nothing. The Menorah is to embody the concept of wisdom, light. And in Proverbs (chap. 8) King Solomon personifies wisdom as metaphorically “calling out to man.” Verse 19, wisdom says, “*My fruit surpasses fine gold.*” We thereby find Torah equating fine gold to wisdom. Therefore, Menorah’s light and requirement to be made of pure gold both attest to its equation to wisdom. Additionally, hammering the Menorah out of one gold block instead of making it through assembly requires greater wisdom, and embellishes this idea. What wisdom does Menorah impart?

SIX BRANCHES = SIX DAYS

The first step in answering this question, is to recognize Menorah’s unique aspects. Seven branches, where six emanate from the center seventh stem, clearly parallel the Six Days of Creation, and the Sabbath. Just as our first blessing

each morning – “Baruch She’amar” – defines God as the God of creation, Temple equally requires this concept. The most primary notion of Temple service is that the nation firmly attests to God as the sole cause of the universe. Menorah delivers this message. Rashi on Exodus 28:6 cites Talmud Yuma regarding the priest’s clothing, that with every six strands of blue, purple, red and linen, there was wound a seventh strand of gold thread. Again, the concept of six days of Creation is highlighted. But if, as Sforno teaches, subsequent to the sin of the Gold Calf, Temple came to correct man’s notions, what does Menorah address?

SIX DEPENDENT BRANCHES: THE PHYSICAL IS NOT ABSOLUTE

The sin of those who created the Gold Calf was that they viewed the physical world as what is truly “real.” They viewed tangible things as absolute truths, more true than the abstract metaphysical God to whom they could not relate. In truth, the physical world, this universe, does not have to exist. It does, only due to God’s kindness. The six branches “depend on the seventh,” as they emanate from the latter. This teaches that the continued existence of the universe – the six days’ creations – depend on God’s will, as the universe can-

not sustain itself. God willed all matter into creation, and He can equally will it out of existence. This design of six branches “depending” (suspended) on the seventh, corrects the fallacy harbored by the Gold Calf followers. They felt a physical object was “more real” than something abstract.

*Arise and make for us a god that will go before us,
for this Moses, the man, who took us up from Egypt,
we know not what has become of him (Exod. 32:1).*

Here, immediately prior to fashioning the Gold Calf, the Jews expressed their attachment to the “man” Moses. Our very point. But in fact, the physical world’s existence is flimsy, always depending on God’s will for its continued existence. *“He renews every day regularly, the works of Creation (Daily Prayers).”* The Menorah corrects the false notion of an absolute physical world. Six branches – six days of creation – are dependent on the seventh. Decoded, this hints to the physical world (six branches) as dependent on God’s will and His natural laws, or the metaphysical world, referred to as the seventh branch. The seventh branch – the Sabbath – has as its goal man’s removal from physical creativity, and the engagement in wisdom.

WHAT HAS GREATER REALITY?

We must realize that the universe is guided by metaphysical laws that are “outside” of the universe. And these laws are more real than the physical world, as they guide the physical world. If one thing guides another, the former is more real than the latter. Natural law is falsely viewed as “inside” all physical objects. But science likes simplicity. We do not say each body has its own law of gravity inside itself, in an attempt to explain why all elements fall after being lifted. Our minds say there is a “single” law of gravity that governs everything, and is external to all matter. Laws are metaphysical realities. We find this approach more pleasing and sensible. Similarly, God does not will each leaf to fall from every tree. Rather, we find far greater expression of God’s greatness by viewing such phenomena as a result of His “laws,” not His independent attention to each leaf. A law removes the need for individual attendance to all leaves. It is much more pleasing to our minds, and we view God greater with such an explanation.

The six branches depending on the seventh for their suspension, refers to the six days of Creation depending on metaphysical laws for their existence. The Gold Calf disease can

be corrected by recognizing that physical objects are subjugated to the laws that govern them. To embellish this point, the seventh center stem had a miracle of its flame burning longer than its oil quantity could sustain. This demonstrated that the physical laws that typically would cause that flame to extinguish, were overridden by God's will. Natural law can be altered by the metaphysical world, or God's will. To further express the subjugation of the physical world to the metaphysical, all six branches had their wicks pointing towards the center branch: a manner of deference. But interesting too is that the center branch itself had its wick pointing towards the Holy of Holies! This teaches that even those very metaphysical laws are not absolute, but they too are God's creations, and subject to His will. (The Holy of Holies is from where God caused His communications to emanate.)

**SPHERES, FLOWERS & CUPS:
HARMONY REVEALS GOD'S GREATEST WISDOM**

Now we must address the Menorah's unique decorations. Each branch represents one of the six days of creation. Yet, despite the difference in each day's creations, all six branches are identical. What, then, must we say these cups, flowers

and spheres refer to? It would appear, what is identical on all days are the main categories of creation. I refer to substance, form, and properties, or function. Regardless of the specific created entities, all matter possesses these properties. And it is precisely by studying these properties that man attains God's intended lessons. These are the areas of wisdom, which each day imparts.

As we study the universe, we identify numerous "elements." Originally, man assumed there were four elements: earth, air, fire and water. But man later learned there exists over one hundred elements as identified in the Periodic Table. Varying properties of each element, from carbon to uranium, teach us about God's universe. We then witness various "forms" of creation, such as living species and minerals. For example, we learn from the different mouth structures of beasts, which are carnivores and which are vegetarians. Carnivores have much wider jaw openings and fanged teeth to help in their hunt and eating. Vegetarians, like cows, have smaller jaw openings. Fish have vertical tail fins, while mammals like dolphins and whales have horizontal tail fins in order to propel them upwards to rise above the surface for air.

But what imparts to man the greatest appreciation of God's wisdom seen in creation, is the "functioning" of matter, or

rather, the “systems” we witness. The solar system, digestive system, weather, etc. impress us most. And when many systems coexist and complement each other as is found in the human being’s respiratory and circulatory systems, we are even more amazed. The reason a system is most impressive, is because it points to a greater plan, and thus, greater knowledge and planning, than in a single entity’s substance or form.

Menorah’s cups refer to creation’s properties and functions (systems), Menorah’s flowers refer to form, and its spheres refer to raw amorphous substance. While Earth’s substances (Menorah’s amorphous sphere), and the form of all creations (Menorah’s flower) carry important lessons, Menorah’s cups (properties & systems) are more numerous on each branch. I believe this may indicate it is through studying the laws and systems of the universe whereby man attains the greatest appreciation of God’s wisdom. An apple is a beautiful creation, but when we study the revolution of the Moon and Earth, which cause seasons, combined with the precise distance of Earth from the Sun, and its axis, we are amazed at the plan, and with God. Therefore I believe there are more cups on each branch to emphasize this point. Through our study of these three areas, we view God’s wisdom. Thus, each branch,

each day of creation, intends to offer man expressions of God's wisdom, as seen in elements like iron and hydrogen, in various forms like plants and animals, but mostly, "how" these creations operate, seen in the numerous systems that guide our universe, from the subatomic world, up to the birth of stars. The reason we find cups, flowers and spheres on the seventh branch, despite the fact that no creation took place on day seven, is to teach that the physical creations of the six days are based on their metaphysical designs – the seventh branch.

SUMMARY

Menorah is a lesson in the dependent and limited nature of the physical world. This world was created. Nothing demands it exists other than God's will. God also determined what properties all creations possess. Placing more trust in physical objects than in God, and certainly imagining physical things help us in any way other than through their natural properties, is foolish. We must not value a Gold Calf more than God, who controls all physical entities, and prohibits their worship. However abstract He is and however emotionally displeasing we initially find it, we must follow our minds

and strive to become convinced that physical entities cannot answer our prayers, be they Western Walls, red bendels, dead Rebbes, or Gold Calves. Instead, we are to follow God and His lessons. God provided manna. He performed numerous miracles. And although we are commanded to follow His natural laws and toil to earn our living and not rely on miracles, prayer teaches us that ultimately, God is the source of our success.

There exists a physical world with laws that govern who eats and who starves. Sitting idly while a farmer toils each season, the idle person dies of hunger while the farmer thrives. But the farmer who is a Torah Jew knows this: despite droughts, a righteous person ultimately relies on God, who can deliver his daily bread. The intelligent Jew and gentile plans according to nature but relies on God to bring matters to success. He gives charity, *tzedaka* without fear of diminishing wealth, and in fact views charity as a means of enriching his lot. And although he abstains from work each Sabbath, he does not fear this will diminish his wealth. God is his rock.

Menorah itself is an example that the details of God's creations must be studied to witness God's wisdom: as we study

every inch of the universe, we also study the Menorah and all other commands. Menorah's primary lesson is that the universe is subjugated to the metaphysical world, to God's will. Menorah corrects the flaw of the Gold Calf followers and hopefully will correct the false views of those Jews and gentiles who still place their hopes in anything except God alone.

BILAM AND THE DONKEY

The story of Bilam and his donkey contains unbelievable events and is described in great detail. Balak was the king of Moav at that time and was faced with the fear of millions of Jews damaging his land by gaining safe passage. To avert this problem, Balak called upon Bilam, a Prophet, and requested that Bilam curse the Jews so that Balak would have ease in attacking them and in driving them out.

When Balak sent the first group of messengers to Bilam, Bilam's reply was that he must consult with God. God's answer was that Bilam should not curse the Jews for they are blessed. Bilam informed the messengers that he was restrained from go-

ing by God's word. Balak persisted and sent more messengers; now higher in rank. Bilam responded by saying that even if his house was filled with silver and gold he couldn't go. Nonetheless Bilam requested an answer from God. This time God gave him permission, however, he still must refrain from cursing the Jews.

What happens next is quite remarkable. Bilam arose early and God was angry that he went. This was after God gave him permission! God placed an angel in the path to deter him as he was riding on his donkey. It states that the donkey saw the angel standing in the path with an outstretched sword in his hand, and that the donkey turned aside and went into the field. Bilam hit the donkey to return it to the path. The angel stood a second time in the vineyard. There was a fence on both sides of the donkey and Bilam. The donkey saw the angel and pressed up against the wall in avoidance, crushing Bilam's leg. Bilam continued to smite the donkey. The angel passed to a place that was narrow with no room to pass left or right. The donkey saw the angel and crouched down under Bilam and Bilam's anger burned, smiting the donkey – this time, with a stick. The following verses depict the next event:

God opened the mouth of the donkey and it said to Bilam, "What have I done that you have smitten me these three times?" Bilam responded, "Because you have mocked me. If there were a sword in my hand I would kill you." The donkey said, "Am I not the donkey that you have ridden upon from long before until today? Is it my nature to act this way?" Bilam replied, "No." God then opened Bilam's eyes and he saw the angel of God standing in the path with a sword outstretched in his hand. Bilam then prostrated himself before the angel. The angel said to Bilam, "For what have you smitten your donkey these three times? Behold I have come out to turn you away because your way is contrary to me. Your donkey has seen me and turned aside these three times. Would it be that you would turn aside. Because now I would kill you and cause her (the donkey) to live." Bilam said to the angel, "I have sinned. I didn't know that you stood in the path to turn me aside. And now if this is bad in your eyes, I will return." The angel said to Bilam, "Go with the men, but only that which I tell you may you speak."¹³

13) Num. 22:28-35

Rashi states that the significance of “three” times represents two things: the three forefathers, and the three Jewish festivals. Ibn Ezra states that once the donkey spoke it died, and that with each successive hitting, Bilam used a stronger object.

Following are questions on this section, including the meaning behind both Rashi’s and Ibn Ezra’s statements:

- 1) Why didn’t Bilam see the angel of God at first?
- 2) What’s the significance of the sword?
- 3) Why, according to Ibn Ezra, did Bilam hit the donkey with a stronger object each time?
- 4) Why did the donkey die after it spoke?
- 5) What was the argument of the donkey?
- 6) Why wasn’t Bilam astounded at the ability of an animal to talk?
- 7) What does the fence allude to, and why did the path become more and more impossible to traverse with each appearance of the angel?
- 8) Of what significance is it that Bilam’s leg was crushed?

Maimonides states¹⁴ that every case in Scripture where we find an angel appearing or talking, the entire account is de-

14) Guide for the Perplexed, book II, chap. xlii

scribing a vision, and not an actual physical event. The event didn't take place in physical reality, but in a person's mind. This being the case, this entire story must be interpreted in this light, according to Maimonides. This is a parable for a conflict with which Bilam was struggling.

If we refer to the events leading up to Bilam riding on the donkey, we see that Bilam comes off appearing as a true follower of God. But with a closer look, his true nature is seen. He was asked to curse the Jews. God told him he could not. The fact that Bilam (during the account of the second messengers) requests from God again to know whether he can curse the Jews shows that he wanted to curse them. That's why he said, "God has restrained me from cursing." Meaning that he really desired to curse, but God prevented him.

This desire to curse the Jews awoke in Bilam a strong conflict. On the one hand, he desired the destruction of the Jewish people. On the other hand, he knew that God blessed them. Bilam was well aware that God's establishment of His Providence over the Jews was due to our forefather's perfection. Abraham's self-realization of the absurdity of idolatry, his conclusion of the reality of monotheism and the Oneness of God secured this treaty of God's Providence. With this

knowledge, Bilam was greatly troubled as to which path to follow, namely 1) his desire for the destruction of the Jews, or 2) the word of God. This entire account is a parable of his conflict.

Interpreting the elements of this story as representing psychological phenomena, the story's real meaning can be explained.

Bilam, in great conflict, decides to travel to Balak with the goal of cursing of the Jews. In order to do so, he must suppress his knowledge of God's command to refrain from cursing them. Riding on his donkey represents the suppression of what his conscience (the donkey) "sees." "Riding" conveys a sense of dominion over another object. Bilam himself (in this vision) represents his evil instincts and thus, isn't aware of reality (the angel of God). One's instincts aren't designed with the ability to judge what is morally good or evil. Instincts are not perceivers: they simply emote. This explains why Bilam couldn't "see" the angel. Bilam, in this story, represents his instincts – a faculty of man unable to 'perceive.' Instincts have only one function: they guide a person towards instinctual satisfaction.

The donkey represents Bilam's conscience: the part of man that detects good and evil.

The angel represents reality, or his intellect: the ability to perceive what is real and true. Bilam's inability to curse the Jews was so threatening, it was represented by an angel of God wielding a sword, a very terrifying sight. The conscience, represented by the donkey, is designed to perceive and make value judgments. This is its main function.

Now that we understand the main components of the parable, (Bilam, his donkey, and the angel represent respectively the instinctual drive, the conscience, and reality), we must interpret this account accordingly.

Bilam riding on his donkey can be interpreted as "his evil instincts are riding (suppressing) his conscience." His conscience alone is aware of the reality – "the donkey sees the angel," but Bilam doesn't. Whenever the conscience goes "off of the path," it starts to become more conscious, making Bilam sense his error. Therefore, Bilam "hits" his conscience to suppress it – "hitting the donkey." His conscience slows him down – "crushes his leg" – as he tries to go on his "path." Bilam's weapon for suppressing his conscience becomes stronger – "he hits the donkey with a stick." Then the conscience finally prevails and 'speaks' – "the donkey talks." The

argument of the donkey is that “it’s not me who’s at fault” – meaning that Bilam gains insight (from his “talking conscience”) into his actions and realizes that there’s something behind his suppression of his conscience. At this point, Bilam becomes aware of his denial only through God’s kindness. That’s why God had to open his eyes. The donkey dying after it spoke means that once his conscience made him aware of this information, the conscience ceases to function – termed here as death. It did its job. It “dies.”

Rashi’s statement that the three things shown to Bilam’s donkey alludes to the three forefathers and the three festivals fits in beautifully: the donkey – Bilam’s conscience – was contemplating the primary reason for God’s direct Providence over the Jews, namely the perfection of our forefathers – which entitled the Jewish nation to God’s Providence. Bilam’s conflict was directly caused by these three individuals (Abraham, Isaac and Jacob). Had it not been for them, he might have been able to curse the Jews. That’s why the donkey turned aside when it thought about the forefathers. Abraham, Isaac and Jacob brought about the relationship with God, and now, Bilam desired to curse them! But all curses are from God. We also see why Bilam acted calmly towards a talking animal, as Maimonides states, this was all a vision.

In summary, the entire account of Bilam and his donkey – according to Maimonides – was a vision or conflict, happening only in his mind. In order for the Torah to inform us of this, the Torah writes it as a metaphor so that many ideas and psychological principles can be encapsulated into one account. A parable also conceals ideas from those who would shrug at them, if they were written openly. The fact that Bilam did travel to Balak in physical reality is not discounted by this explanation.

THE TEMPLE

The Tabernacle and Temple have always been the focus of the world both during its existence during the great kings, and even today, as we all await its final reconstruction. But why? What is so important about this structure? What was God's objective in its creation and design? As we study it, we will find that its form is very specific, aiming towards crucial ideas. The object of this chapter is to shed light on the Tabernacle's requirements: the purpose of the two rooms

(the Holy, and the Holy of Holies), the various vessels found therein, and the restriction of entering the Holy of Holies except for the high priest on the Day of Atonement, Yom Kippur.

The form of the Tabernacle is rectangular, 30 cubits long by 10 cubits wide. A cubit measuring approximately 1.5 feet. It's only entrance is on the eastern side. The first ten cubits upon entering are called the Ulam. No articles are placed in this area. In the next ten cubits are found the Menorah, the Table and the Inner Altar. Together the Ulam's 10 cubits and these additional ten cubits form a room called the Kodesh, the Holies. The remaining ten cubits is called the Kodesh Kodashim, the Holy of Holies, separated from the Kodesh by a curtain called the Paroches. In this Kodesh Kodashim is placed the Ark, which contains the Tablets of the Law (the Ten Commandments), the staff of Aaron, the canister of oil used for anointing the kings of Israel, and the jar of the Manna – the food, which God fed the Jewish people in the desert forty years. What are the ideas behind these laws?

There is one command with regard to the High Priest which I believe begins to shed some light. The High Priest, and certainly other priests must never enter into the Kodesh Kodashim, except on Yom Kippur. On this day, the Jews are forgiven for their transgressions. Only the High Priest enters on

this day. He brings in the incense from the inner altar, places it in front of the Ark in a fire pan, and causes it to cloud that room. He leaves and enters only one more time to remove the fire pan with its ashes. What objective is there that none should enter into this room?

Interestingly, a peculiarity of this room is that God says that He causes a voice to emanate from this room, from between the two cherubs which are above the ark. This implies that God is commanding us not to approach the point from which He causes this voice to project. This demonstrates the idea that one cannot approach God with one's limited understanding. As God had told Moses, "*For man cannot see Me while alive (Exod. 33:20).*" We can only "go so far." Therefore, abstaining from entering this room demonstrates that we cannot understand God in our present, human state.

This explains the relevance of the vessels in this room. The Ark contains the Divine Law which man could have never developed on his own; ideas which must be of Divine origin – thus belonging to God's realm. The oil was used to anoint the kings of Israel who were chosen only by God – man has no knowledge as to who will be king. When Samuel thought to select King Saul's successor, Samuel said of Eliav (David's brother), "*This is God's anointed,*" whereby God replied

to Samuel, *“Look not on his countenance nor on the height of his stature because I have refused him (Sam. 1.XV, 1:7).”* This taught Samuel that he had assumed he was God’s chosen one, and therefore this flaw had to be corrected. Perhaps this is precisely why God did not originally instruct Samuel as to which son was to be king. God wished Samuel’s error be brought out into the open so Samuel might perfect this flaw.

The staff of Aaron was placed in this room as well. This was the staff which miraculously blossomed into almonds during the revolt of Korach. Korach was claiming the Priesthood for his family, assuming that Aaron (already chosen by God) had erred in acting as the priest. Thus, Korach approached Divine Wisdom. This staff was also placed in this Holy of Holies, as it too testifies to God’s supreme, unknowable wisdom. The Manna is also a demonstration of Divine Wisdom: it is food, but does not produce human waste. Its appearance was miraculous, and the Jews wondered “what is it?”

All of the articles found in the Kodesh Kodashim share a common distinction: they represent that which man cannot approach. In Samuel I, 1:19, a passage occurs which concurs with this idea: *“And God had smote the men of Bet Shemesh because they had looked into the Ark of the Lord.”* The sin of

these people was that they were expressing the heretical notion that they could "see" something about God by looking into the Ark. Their error was generated by a need to make God tangible somehow, which is the worst of philosophical crimes. We must – above all else – possess the correct ideas concerning God.

Now that we have posited that the Kodesh Kodashim – the room behind the curtain – houses that which we cannot approach, we may suggest that the Kodesh deals with concepts that are humanly attainable. We should not guess what those concepts are, for they are already familiar to us.

If we review the High Holiday prayers, we see that there are two praises of God. 1) He is Omnipotent 2) He is Omniscient. That is, God is all-powerful and all-knowing. There are only these two categories, for all acts which God performs are understood by us to be a display of either His Power or His Knowledge. In order for us to be constantly aware of this, God commanded Moses to create the Table, upon which there would always exist the twelve loaves of bread. Twelve signifying the twelve tribes, and bread to signify God's ability to provide sustenance. God also commanded Moses to build the inner altar. Upon the Altar the priests would offer the incense, a relationship between man and God, demonstrat-

ing that God is aware of man's actions. The Table reminds us of God's Omnipotence, while the Altar reminds us of God's Omniscience.

What is the purpose of the Menorah? If we look at the daily prayers, we begin every morning with *"Blessed be the One Who spoke and the world came into being, blessed be He."* In Daniel's blessing of God after God had granted his request to be informed of Nevuchadnetzar's dream and its interpretation¹⁵, Daniel said, *"To the One Whose name is Eloka, blessed is He forever and ever."* In both cases, God is defined first, before any praise is made. This is to say that when one relates to God, it is essential that he is aware of whom he directs his thoughts, and to whom we direct our praises each day. Daniel did the same, and perhaps the Menorah serves this very purpose. Namely, to define that the God who we relate to in the Temple is the God who created the world and rested on the seventh day. We are reminded of this by seeing the Menorah which is composed of seven branches, six branches emanating from the seventh, as there were six days of creation and a seventh of rest. The six branches pay homage to the seventh as their wicks must all be directed to the center seventh. The seventh, center branch conveys the seventh day as the pur-

15) Dan. II:19, 20

pose of creation. Contrary to the popular view that physical creation was an end in itself, Judaism claims that the six days of creation have a goal: a day of physical abstention, enabling man time to ponder the world of wisdom. Finally, the command to create the Menorah from one solid block of gold (not made through soldering segments) serves to remind us of the concept of the Unity of the Creator.

Thus, we have three main concepts derived from the Kodesh:

1) We must understand that we are relating to the God who created the world in six days and rested on the seventh. We define who we are praising. This is what the Menorah represents.

2) God is Omnipotent – all powerful. This is represented by the Table.

3) God is Omniscient – all knowing. This is represented by the Inner Altar. An altar only makes sense if the Recipient – God – is aware of human beings and their attempts to draw near to Him. These are the categories knowable to man and therefore what we are reminded of by the Temple's vessels.

However, if we cannot approach God directly, how is it that the High Priest can enter the Kodesh Kodashim, the Holy of Holies, and why with incense? Why is he commanded to cloud

the room¹⁶ *“that he die not,”* and why on Yom Kippur?

The answer is that as we have said, the incense represents approaching God. The High Priest's entrance into the Holy of Holies shows us that there is a “closer relation” to God on this day, due to God's act of forgiveness. That which represents our prayer (incense) is figuratively brought “closer” to God. The same idea is represented with the levels of restriction at Sinai: Moses alone drew to the top of the mountain, Joshua lower, and others still lower. Various levels of physical proximity even on Sinai indicates the various levels of perfection possessed by those allowed to ascend. The purpose of the priest smoking up the room is to remind him that his understanding of God is still blocked, represented by the smoke. God knows that even a person on the highest level who enters the Holy of Holies is still in danger of forming erroneous ideas about God. Smoking up the room physically demonstrates that there is a veil between him and God...even in this room. Similarly, when God revealed Himself to the Jews on Mount Sinai, the Torah tells us that there was “darkness, cloud, and thick darkness (fog).” This was done to demonstrate that there is a constant veil between man and God.

Why is there is a specific arrangement of the vessels in the

16) Leviticus 16:13

Kodesh? Both the Menorah and the Table are placed close to the dividing curtain to represent that these two concepts are closer to perfection (closer to the Holy of Holies) than is the altar. The altar, being man's approach, is not always perfect, and is thus removed further from the Paroches than are the Table which represents God's Power and the Menorah which defines the God to whom we relate. These two being undoubtedly perfect as they emanate from God.

In summary, the Tabernacle is a structure which represents our limited understanding of God, but also informs us of truths. It is a vehicle for us to be aware of our relationship to God on the different days of the year, as we offer various sacrifices on different days. And conversely, when we witness the absence of the Tabernacle, we are made aware of a severed relationship.

ADDENDUM

The priest wore 8 special garments; 2 of which point to interesting ideas: The gold head plate, the "Tzitz" had "Holy to God" inscribed upon it. He also wore a breastplate which had 12 stones, corresponding to the 12 tribes. I believe these relate to two aspects of a person living on the highest level:

The head plate denotes that one's thoughts, his intellect, should be used primarily for understanding God. This is why it is placed on the head, the figurative location of the soul. The breastplate is placed upon the heart, demonstrating that one's heart, the seat of the emotions, should be devoted to his brethren, the 12 tribes. Thus, both aspects of man, his intellect and his emotions are subjugated to the correct areas. Our Tefillin demonstrate the same.

THE INTRUDER

Parshas Mishpatim describes numerous laws, without resorting to metaphor. We are taught of slaves, damages and other laws in a literal manner. Why then, when treating of the intruder, does God state, *"If the sun shines upon you...(Exod. 22:2)?"* Rashi interprets this "sunshine" as follows: *"This is only a kind of metaphor; if it is clear the intruder is at peace with you, just as the sun brings peace...you are liable for shedding the intruder's blood."* Torah teaches (according to Rashi) that despite the intruder's monetary crime, he does not forfeit his

right to life if he would not kill you, had you opposed his robbery. And if you did kill him, you would have no defense based on grounds of trespass and/or robbery. From here we see 3 lessons:

1) Torah demands a level of intelligence. It demands we understand and apply metaphor. God's lesson of employing metaphor is that God desires that we use intelligence. By not resorting to literal description, but employing metaphor, God's lesson is that the modes of deduction, induction and parallels are indications that intelligence are essential to understanding Torah. That is, God purposefully employs metaphor to teach the very lesson that Torah requires intelligence. But why here? In what manner is the intruder a more fitting case to be described using metaphor?

2) We are absolutely clear about what a pit is, what a fire is, and what damages are. These are clearly measured by absolute physical parameters. But can one be absolutely certain of the intent of another (the intruder)? How does one measure such an amorphous thing called "intent?" Perhaps as this is a "grey" area, since there is no unit that can accurately quantify "intent", a metaphoric description of the degree required is necessary. Thus, God tells us that it must be as clear as sunshine: 100%. So if you know with 100% clarity that the in-

truder is not intent on killing you, you cannot kill him. How do you know this? It's a personal call, as seen from the Torah's lack of a concrete measure. Each relationship is different, and only the victim through his own intuition can gauge if this specific intruder would kill him. Perhaps this is why the verse says, "If the sun shines upon him..." It's up to "him" to make this determination.

3) God equates the degree of our certainty to daylight. If there is any doubt the intruder might kill you, your defense is justified. Thus, error in this case sides with the victim. Any sense of risk allows the victim to use action.

TALMUDIC METAPHORS

Talmudic quote:

Once on a Friday eve, Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa noticed that his daughter was sad and he said to her, "My daughter, why are you sad?" She replied, "My oil can got mixed up with my vinegar can and I

kindled of it the Sabbath light.” He said to her, “My daughter, why should this trouble you? He who had commanded the oil to burn can also command the vinegar to burn.” A Tanna taught, “The light continued to burn the whole day until they took of it light for the Havdala (Taanis 25a).”

A wise Rabbi once said:

To paraphrase Shmuel Hanagid¹⁷, the value of aggadah (allegory) is found only in the gems of wisdom one derives from it. If one derives nonsense, it has no value. Very few people are capable of “diving into the deep water and coming up with pearls [Ramban metaphor].” Other individuals have no business delving into aggadah. They would do better refraining from trying to interpret that which is beyond them, “B’mufrosh mimcha al tidrosh; What is distant from you, do not offer an explanation.” Such people cannot discern between something literal or metaphorical.

17) Mavo HaTalmud (Intro to the Talmud) end of Talmud Brachos

Bearing this in mind, how might we explain this Talmudic portion? As the Rabbis wrote in metaphor, we must first detect their subtle clues, distinguishing literal elements from metaphor. For example, Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa's daughter actually erred and switched one can with another. Also literal was her anxiety, as well as her father's response. But vinegar burning appears metaphoric, as does the duration of the light. Let us now line up our questions.

THE RIDDLES

During daylight, a candle is useless. Therefore, of what significance is it that the light burned "the whole day?"

What is the meaning of Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa's response?

Why was his response necessary in order that the vinegar ignite?

If Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa was worthy and this was a literal miracle, could God not ignite the vinegar even without his reply to his daughter?

Of what significance is it that the vinegar burned until they used it to light the havdala candle?

A SOLUTION

As candlelight does not function during daylight, it appears the “light” burning throughout the day refers to another type of illumination. Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa’s daughter was troubled. But this was because she focused on her specific situation of the darkness that would set in, now that vinegar cannot light. Her father intended to console her. What was his response? He taught her in other words, *“Daughter, Although our specific circumstances will be inconvenienced without light, nonetheless, we must appreciate God’s creations: He designed certain materials to ignite so as to assist man by providing light at night.”* Focussing on the larger picture, that God designed the world with this benefit, we are less disturbed at our subjective darkness, and grow appreciative for general laws of nature. We enjoy many benefits of God’s world, including substances that burn: *“It could be oil, it could be vinegar.”* The focus should be that something does in fact give man light, not that I have darkness for a brief period. It may be said of such people who have this proper perspective, *“They enjoyed the light of that lesson the whole day!”* Due to this perspective which must come first, one can then enjoy the lesson. Thus, the metaphor is scripted that the vinegar burned only after Rabbi

Chanina ben Dosa taught his daughter this perspective.

There was no vinegar burning. That “light” was the “appreciation” of God’s goodness that man can enjoy light. The recognition of God’s design of substances that ignite, engenders an appreciation, a “light,” that one enjoys even during the day. For it was not any literal light they enjoyed, but the institution of flammable substances that God created to help man.

What is meant by “the light continued to burn the whole day until they took of it light for the Havdala?” Once darkness set in on Saturday night, the appreciation of the havdala light took on new meaning. No longer did Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa’s daughter appreciate the mere light burning before her. Now she viewed it in general terms. She appreciated light not due to her subjective momentary benefit, but as representing God’s world where He enables substances to ignite and help man. They did not literally take a burning vinegar lamp and light the havdala candle, for the vinegar never literally ignited. What in fact occurred was that Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa’s daughter applied this lesson to the havdala candle. She transformed from a person who focussed on her subjective circumstances, to one who views the greater good. This is termed as “lighting the havdala candle from the vin-

egar.” That is, she illuminated her havdala candle with the new meaning she gained from her father’s lesson of the vinegar. Viewing the havdala candle that Saturday night, for the first time, she did not simply enjoy the light, but rather, she appreciated the Creator who benefits man with light. What specific substance that ignites (oil or vinegar) was irrelevant.

A second interpretation presented itself to me and perhaps fits Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa’s words better. *“He who had commanded the oil to burn can also command the vinegar to burn”* mean that God can do all. Meaning, if this was an urgent matter, God would assist us. Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa intended to reduce the gravity his daughter projected onto a small inconvenience of darkness for that one night. In other words, *“Daughter, had we experienced a dire need, we know we can rely on God.”*

However, the first interpretation above better fits the Tanna’s words, *“The light continued to burn the whole day until they took of it light for the Havdala.”*

PUNISHMENT: THE GOLD CALF

COAUTHORED BY DANI ROTH

Those who worshipped the Gold Calf could no longer remain part of the Jewish nation, which follows the one God. Violators were killed in one of three manners. If the worshipper was forewarned and had witnesses, death was by the sword. If there were witnesses but no warning, a lesser crime, one died by a plague. And if one was not warned against worship, nor was he or she witnessed worshipping, the method of death was by drinking a mixture of the pulverized Gold Calf and water.¹⁸ Those who sinned would die through this drink; those who did not sin were unharmed.

The Torah does not communicate it, but apparently, Moses knew God wished to reveal the Gold Calf worshippers through this drink. But is this not a strange method? Additionally, why did Moses melt the Gold Calf before grinding it? He could have immediately ground it, as we see his ultimate intention was to have the Jews drink the gold-dust/water mixture. My close friend and Torah study partner (chavrusa) Dani Roth asked as follows: If Moses sought to expose the Gold Calf as a powerless idol, won't the punishment of death coming through drinking particles of the Calf actually make it appear

18) Rashi, Exod. 32:20

that the Calf has powers? A great question indeed. Dani and I arrived at the following conclusions.

Melting disfigures the Calf into an amorphous lump of metal. Moses did this first, as he wished to expose the deified Calf as nothing more than a material substance all would agree is unworthy of worship, as it possesses no powers. Forming a calf from a clearly powerless lump of gold cannot grant it powers. Moses' reducing the calf back to a mere lump of metal teaches this lesson. The Jews who worshipped the Calf, did so due to its form; they projected imagined powers onto the gold once it was formed into the god of Egypt, a calf. However, the Gold Calf was unveiled as a lie, for it could not defend itself against Moses' melting. Moses' intent was to help the Jews see past their projections, and abandon their belief before they would be punished with death. This way they died as one who repented. This explains why Moses first melted the Calf before grinding it.

Moses had ground the Calf into gold dust, mixed it with water, and demanded the Jews drink the mixture.¹⁹ This does not validate the Gold Calf as possessing any power: God was the one who killed the sinners. Rashi teaches that Moses in-

19) Exod. 32:20

tended to test the Jews for whom there were no witnesses of their suspected idol worship. If affected by the mixture, this exposed them as idolaters. Apparently, Moses felt many Jews attempted to conceal their idol worship. Rashi teaches that Moses was testing the Jews, just as the waters test the suspected wife (the Sotah). What is this parallel? If a wife was warned by her husband not to be with another man, and she violated his warning, but does not confess her sin, the husband may have the priest give the wife a special drink. If she did not confess her sin, the drink would kill her. But let us focus on why the wife would not confess. This is because she feels she could keep hidden from her husband the illicit relationship with the other man. The drink would unveil reality, and that she cannot keep this hidden from God. In connection with the Gold Calf too, the Jews are similarly unfaithful: in this case, unfaithful to God. The Jews did not wish to confess their Gold Calf worship unseen by Moses while he was atop Mt. Sinai. Moses therefore forced the Jews to drink, teaching them that what is on their “insides” (their sinful defection from God) cannot be hidden from God. The mixture entering their bodies is a metaphor for an “inner” truth becoming revealed. It ends up there were 2 sins: 1) worshipping the Calf, and 2) denying God’s knowledge of their sin. Just as

the waters enter the insides of man's body, God "enters" the insides of man's thoughts.

Denying their sin, the Jews wished to maintain their attachment to the Calf. Not admitting a sin is due to the sinner's failure to view his error: he wishes to remain with his sinful belief. This means he believes the Calf to be a valid object of worship.

Moses desired to help the Jews repent by forcing them to realize that only God knows man's thoughts; not a golden idol. The distinction between those who died from the drink from those who did not, was a clear proof that something other than the Gold Calf controls nature, and more, this Being knows man's thoughts.

In the end, the Gold Calf could not defend itself from being melted, it was exposed as simply metal, and worshipping it met with death, not success. The Jews' esteem for the Calf was a grave error. They ultimately had to answer to the one true Power, the only Being man is to worship, since God alone is the only being who knows man's thoughts, and can answer our prayers. The Jews drank a mixture that distinguished a sinner from an innocent person, teaching this sublime lesson of one Deity that lives, and possesses knowledge of man; enabling Him to reward man or to punish him.

ANGELS DON'T KNOW ARAMAIC?

I recently heard two questions concerning angels. The first is based on two related Talmudic sources:

Rabbi bar bar Channa said, "When I went after Rabbi Eliezer to pray for the sick, at times he prayed in Hebrew, and at times in Aramaic. But how did he do so? For we learned that Rabbi Yochanan sated, "Anyone who asks for his needs (prays) in Aramaic, the ministering angels will not respond to him, since the angels do not recognize Aramaic. The answer is that sick people are different, since God's presence is with them (Sabbath 12b)."

Tosfos is astonished at this and states, "All man's thoughts angels know, but they don't know Aramaic?!" How do we reply to Tosfos? My friend Jessie asked, "Why are we praying to angels, when we are to pray to God alone?" And even if this is true, what is the meaning? We must also understand what is meant by God "being with" the sick.

The second source (Sota 33a) says one may pray in any language. The Talmud cites the quote above as a question, but resolves the conflict by saying, *“Any language can be used in prayer (i.e., angels understand even Aramaic) is applied to a congregation’s prayers. But when one prays as an individual, he must not pray in Aramaic, as the angels don’t recognize it.”*

The question is obvious: Do angels recognize Aramaic, or not? What’s the difference if one is praying alone or with others: how does this affect the language skills of angels? And why is Aramaic singled out, as opposed to other languages?

Focusing on the clues, we will arrive at our answer. We are told that Aramaic prayers of individuals – not congregations – are not recognized. Aramaic prayers for the sick – even made by individuals – are recognized, since *“God’s presence is with the sick.”*

What is significant about one who prays alone? When one does not pray with the congregation, and is isolated from others, one cannot escape the feeling that his prayers are only from himself. He experiences a larger measure of entitlement. When praying to be saved from his evil twin Esav, Jacob said, *“I have grown small from all of Your kindness (Gen. 32:11).”* Jacob recognized this idea, that the feeling of en-

itlement, in fact, can reduce one's true entitlement to God's kindness, "*I have grown small.*" Jacob was aware that all God's kindnesses might have had an adverse effect on his perfection, namely, on his humility.

To feel "worthy" of God's kindness, is to engage arrogance. Arrogance aroused when man prays alone, causes him to view his mitzvos and good acts as a tool for ulterior benefit. This view is incorrect: Torah fulfillment and upright morality are worthwhile...without side benefits. If we follow God's Torah merely as a means to gain success in any area, we do not possess a true opinion of the Torah, as it is meant to benefit our souls, not our daily physical needs. Ironically, this incorrect view of Torah decreases our true entitlement. And when Jacob felt what he already received from God might have corrupted him, this was due again to his fear that he might have overestimated himself, thereby reducing his worthiness of God's continued kindnesses. Pirkei Avos 4:7 too teaches this idea to not use the Torah as a means for personal gain. Additionally, arrogance has a way of deluding us about the degree of our goodness. Thus, we may cross the line of poorly assessing how deserving we truly are.

The Rabbis speak metaphorically and non-literally, in order to teach vital lessons. Tosfos is correct: angels know man's thoughts, and thus, no language is a barrier to angels. Suggesting an individual's prayers in Aramaic are not recognized, is a lesson: our prayers are compromised when we pray alone. Our arrogance and sense of entitlement are "as if" unintelligible by those beings who relate our prayers to God. The Talmud does not say we pray to angels. But as we learn throughout Torah and the Rabbis, angels play a role in our lives. Regarding both, God's communications to prophets or His kindnesses towards all individuals, or our prayers to Him, angels play a role. I will expound more on this in a minute. But let us grasp this concept of "angels not recognizing Aramaic." This is a Rabbinic metaphor that relates the idea of our reduced worth due to entitlement feelings. Aramaic was the language used to translate Torah readings for the masses who did not know Hebrew. Thus, Aramaic carries a sense of entitlement. I believe this to be the unique character of Aramaic, and why it embellishes this lesson that entitlement compromises our prayers. The fact that angels suddenly recognize Aramaic when a congregation prays, must cause us to scratch our head. This Rabbinic statement intends to alert us to a conflict, and strives to uncover the hidden meaning. Why

are prayers for the sick heard in any language? This is because our concern is so great for others, that there is no possibility of arrogance, even when praying alone. This unselfish focus is referred to as “God being with the sick.” And when we pray with a congregation, again, our focus is not that God answers “my” prayers, since I am praying with a large group. My worth is as part of the nation of Israel, not my own merits.

The Talmud does not suggest that we are to pray to anyone, but God alone. What then is the role of angels in prayer? Maimonides states about the perfect person, *“such a person will undoubtedly perceive nothing but things very extraordinary and divine, and see nothing but God and His angels.”*²⁰

In his Mishna Torah (Yesodei Hatorah 2:7) Maimonides teaches of the various levels of angels, including those called “ishim” who *“speak and appear to prophets in visions.”* Angelic cherubs are a central part of Judaism. Their golden forms are commanded to be created above the Ark housing the Ten Commandments. There are additional angelic forms in Temple. Maimonides states:

20) Guide for the Perplexed, book ii, chap. xxxvi

...the belief in the existence of angels is connected with the belief in the existence of God; and the belief in God and angels leads to the belief in Prophecy and in the truth of the Law. In order to firmly establish this creed, God commanded [the Israelites] to make over the ark the form of two angels. The belief in the existence of angels is thus inculcated into the minds of the people, and this belief is in importance next to the belief in God's Existence; it leads us to believe in Prophecy and in the Law, and opposes idolatry (ibid, book iii, chap. xlv).

The point I intend to stress is that God created an abstract but real system of interaction between Himself and mankind, and angels play an indispensable role. We do not pray to angels, but angels also play a role in how our prayers are related to God. As Maimonides said, it is a vast study (Yesodei Hatorah 211). This is the meaning behind our Torah and Talmudic sources.

“FALLEN” ANGELS

The Nefillim lived in the land in those days and afterwards, when the sons of the judges came to the daughters of men and bore them; they were the mighty ones, renown of ancient times (Gen. 6:4).

Yonasan ben Uzziel offers this commentary:

They were Shame-chazzai and Uzzi-el, who fell from heaven and were in the land in those days...

Are we to assume this is literal, that non-physical things (angels) can “fall to Earth” and procreate with women? Or, perhaps Yonasan ben Uzziel echoes the other Rabbis...

This Torah section recounts those corrupt societies that precipitated the Flood. God communicates the flaw of those people: they grew arrogant due to their amazing stature. Their height and might caused other peoples’ hearts to “fall”: i.e., they feared them and felt powerless. The Rabbis teach, this is the meaning of “Nefillim,” those who cause the hearts of others to “fall.” The verse also tells us they “lived in the

land in those days and afterwards”. Longevity also contributes to one’s invincibility.

“...they were the mighty ones, renown of ancient times” means they were uniquely strong and this was famous among mankind. Thus, they must have had an astonishing degree of form and power unique from the rest of mankind. Now think about that: form and power...doesn’t that correlate well to the names Yonasan ben Uzziel cites? “Shame-chazzai” means “fame from what is seen (form).” And “Uzzi-el” means “God, my might (power).” Meaning, society named these men of great stature based on their appearance, and due to their might, as if they beheld God’s might.

Finally, the verse itself bears out that these were humans, not angels: “when the sons of the judges came to the daughters of men and bore them.” Who is “them?” The only subject in this verse are the Nefillim. The judges bore the Nefillim; they were human.

NOAH AND THE TALKING RAVEN

I recently received the following question:

The Talmud cites Reish Lakish's comments on the passage, "And he sent the raven...(Gen. 8:7)":

The raven gave Noah an irrefutable argument: "God hates me, and you hate me. God hates me as He commanded to take seven of each pure species, but only two of the impure (my) species. And you hate me, as you did not take from the pure species for your mission, rather, me. If the heat or cold will kill me, the world will lack a species. Perhaps you desire my mate!" Noah replied, "Wicked one! In the ark, I was forbidden to my wife, who is normally permitted to me. All the more so I am forbidden to your mate, who is always forbidden to me (Sanhedrin 108b)!"

Obviously, the raven doesn't have the abstract capacity to think, make an argument, or talk to Noah. What is the idea of the raven's suspicion of Noah being out to destroy that species? Why would the raven think that Noah would desire his

mate? How are we supposed to understand this? What can the metaphor be?

My reply follows:

We must first use the Torah's clues to grasp Noah's mind-set, if we are to answer your questions. Upon the cessation of the rain, the Torah states:

Noah opened up the window (chalon) of the Ark which he made. And he sent the raven, and it went out to and fro, until the waters dried from upon the Earth. And he sent the dove from himself to see if the waters had ended from the face of the Earth (Genesis, 8:6-8).

A few questions present themselves: When did God instruct Noah to make a "chalon", a window? Earlier²¹, God instructed Noah to make a "tzohar." Even if one follows the opinion that tzohar means window, why here did the Torah change the word from "tzohar" to "chalon?" We also notice that the passage states "...the window which Noah made." Who else could have made it?! This seems superfluous. When we see some-

21) Gen. 6:16

thing apparently repetitive, we know there must be a lesson. And what was the purpose of sending the raven? Why is it not disclosed, as is done regarding the purpose of the dove in passage 8:8?

I believe a few proper questions will lead one to the answer:

What is a window for?

For when was the window to be used: prior to the flood, or subsequent?

What are the differences between a raven and a dove?

A window can be used for light, let in air, shield from poor weather, or to look outdoors. We can determine that Noah knew what was on the outside as the Flood began, as he was told by God that all life would be destroyed²². Perhaps then, the window would be used subsequent to the flood. But for what? Sending out birds alone? From the quotes above, it appears Noah harbored some undisclosed emotional conflict.

The Torah goes out of the way to tell us that it was Noah who made the window. Again, he made the entire ark, which includes this window. Therefore, the words *“that Noah made”* are not a repetition of who made the ark. Torah does not

22) Gen. 6:17

repeat itself. The lesson is that Noah made the window on his own, with no command from God. The Torah is pointing out that Noah desired a window for some reason. If he knows what is occurring prior to the flood, I suggest that he was concerned with the period subsequent to the flood. Meaning, Noah worried about what he would find after the flood was over.

Prior to exiting the ark, Noah sent the raven. The Torah is concealing something, for it did not tell us why he sent the raven, as it does disclose regarding the dove. In my opinion, Noah did not want to face the corpses of his society, once the ark landed and the water subsided. The raven is flesh eating. Noah was not yet interested in seeing if the land dried up, as he didn't send the dove, for whose purpose this served. But he first sent a flesh eating bird, with a concealed purpose to discern whether there were bodies near the ark, something Noah did not want to face. If the raven did not return, Noah would know the raven found food, corpses, and he would be emotionally braced to face the tragic site outside of the ark. This explains why he made a separate structure of a window, in addition to the tzohar.

A wise Rabbi explained why Noah planted wine grapes

upon his exit from the ark. He was experiencing depression from solitude, as the only members left on Earth, and used drunkenness to escape the depression. This very same worry is what prompted him to create a window, on his own accord. Now we can answer the questions.

Noah's state of mind was not favorable. He knew the mission of the animals was to sustain the species. Sending the raven, Noah was grappling with this new reality. He risked a species, possibly as an unconscious expression of his troubled state of mind. Precisely using a species that had only one male and one female, Noah unconsciously expressed an aggression towards his morbid experience and the ark's purpose: sustaining the species. This is the meaning of the raven's words.

The Rabbis scripted this metaphor to teach this lesson. Additionally, the raven was suspect of Noah committing bestiality with its mate. This too is a reflection of Noah's state of mind; there was no real discussion between a bird and man. Somehow the elongated stay on the ark among the animals evoked identification with them. Noah's defense was halachic in content, saying the raven's mate was a prohibited species.

Using a halachic response means Noah would not commit the act of bestiality, but it can also mean that he did harbor the psychological tendency. This is similar to a burglar breaking into a home, and when caught without any stolen items, saying in his defense, "I didn't take anything!" Although the burglar did not violate robbery, he did have the intention. Noah too possessed some corruption of mind, according to the Rabbis' scripted metaphor of a talking raven.

REPETITION

GOD RESTED

God is not human; the notion of Him "resting" is therefore not sensible. How do we understand the Bible's words below?

And the children of Israel shall guard the Sabbath, to observe the Sabbath for all generations, an eternal treaty. Between Me and between the Children of Israel, it is a an eternal sign, that [in] six days God created the heavens and Earth, and on the seventh day He ceased and rested (Exod. 31:16,17).

On verse 17, the great Torah (Bible) commentator Ibn Ezra wrote:

The explanation of a "sign" (os) is that in six days God created. And behold, one who performs labor on the Sabbath, he contradicts Creation. And the Torah speaks in man's language so listeners will understand, and so, [Torah] says God "rested." For God does not tire or become weary. For behold His creations, that are the heavy bodies, the stars and planets of heaven, eternally revolve day and night.

And certainly as the heavy bodies, the stars and planets do not tire, even more so, the Creator of everything [does not tire], Who dwells eternally, and existed eternally. And His acts are not through [His] motion. Rather, all He performs is through His word [His will].

Let us appreciate the problems and understand this fundamental. Ibn Ezra teaches that one who labors on the Sabbath, contradicts Creation. But as Creation was completed billions²³ of years ago, how can anyone today “contradict” Creation? What this means requires an understanding of what a “sign” is.

A sign is that, which, through association, equates or represents significance, like a landmark, a highway sign, a badge, or a date. How is Sabbath a sign “between God and Israel?”

23) The age of the Earth is 4.54 billion years old. This age is based on evidence from radiometric age dating of meteorite material and is consistent with the radiometric ages of the oldest-known terrestrial and lunar samples (Wikipedia). The Jewish calendar date of 5775 is from Adam’s formation and forward. Therefore, there is no contradiction with Torah, nor does Torah command man to believe what is false, nor to believe in the date of 5775 as the age of the universe or of the Earth. The 6 “days” of Creation were not 24-hour periods. Rav Chaim Ozer Chait explained: “The facts that you see light from a star 10 million light years away reveals that the universe must have existed at least that long in order that this starlight reached your eyes. In other words, it takes 10 million years for that star’s light to travel to Earth. Thus, the universe is at least 10 million years old.

The Jew's role is to spread God's fame in the world for all peoples to benefit, just as the Jew benefits. And the most primary concept a Jew can share, is that the universe has a Creator. For this concept is what we mean by "God." Proclaiming the existence of God, means to proclaim a single Cause of the universe. That God is also kind and merciful, are not as crucial as knowing that all things owe their existence to a single Being. For a thing's existence is its most primary feature.

This is the significance of God's Sabbath. By not laboring while all others do, the Jew stands out from the other nations. As Maimonides states, when we are asked why we cease our labors, we explain that we are mimicking the Creator, who too rested on the seventh day. With our deviant behavior, we act as catalysts to bring awareness of God to all others. We act as a "sign" to Creation, and thereby, a sign to God's existence. If however we violate the Sabbath, we prevent other peoples from learning the Torah truth of Creation. This is what Ibn Ezra means that we contradict Creation when not observing the Sabbath.

Ibn Ezra continues to clarify that God cannot "rest." From the stars and planets that never cease, he proves God's inability to tire or grow weary. How is this a proof? He means that as the spheres do not propel themselves, but require

God to move them, and as the spheres do not cease, we infer that God who propels all stars and planets, does not tire. Ibn Ezra then explains that we must not think God propels the spheres through any motion of His own. It is all through His will. And we know God does not have to act on a physical entity to manage it, from Creation itself, where He created everything without acting on any other existence. For nothing else existed prior to Creation.

So what does the word “rest” (vayinafash) mean, if not that God required rest? And what more can God do by resting, after the verse states that He already “ceased” (shavas)? Is this not redundant?

Rest means that although God ceased from Creation, He added another dimension to that cessation. Ceasing is a negative...God “stopped” something He was doing. Resting, however, means God gave this inactivity a positive designation. Meaning, through His rest – not His inactivity – on the seventh day, God expressed that “rest” from Creation was a goal, not merely the lack of creation. Rest, means that cessation from physical creation is a preferred state. Thereby, God highlights physical inactivity as a good. How is it good? It is

in this state when one's mind can engage in studying God's creations. When active, one's mind is preoccupied. But when at rest, one is free to ponder the universe, as God indicates is His plan. By stating not only that He ceased labor, but also "rested," God calls our attention to this inactivity as a true value. God's intent in creating a universe with astonishing systems and creatures, is in order that mankind have that which he can reflect on to discover a Creator. And the marvels scientists find astound them.

God made a treaty with the Jewish nation to observe the Sabbath. This is one sign. The Jew also bears his circumcision as a sign of God's selected nation: circumcision too is called a sign. And a third sign is Tefillin. Tefillin are a sign of the Torah, as Tefillin contains Torah portions and are ordered in the same order as found in Torah. So Torah's three signs concern the following: 1) Sabbath teaches the most primary concept: a Creator exists; 2) circumcision is the mark of the teachers of this concept, the Jew; and 3) the relationship between the Creator and the Jew is via Torah study (Tefillin).

It is interesting that we do not wear Tefillin on Sabbath. Perhaps this is to indicate that although Torah is the method of adhering to God and proclaiming His fame today, this was

not always the case. There was a preferred state prior to Torah, when Adam, Noah and Abraham discovered God from the universe alone, displaying the innate capacity of our intellect. Therefore, on that day that commemorates Creation, we do not wear Tefillin. For Creation is superior to Torah in our discovery of God...the Creator²⁴. The world contains all that is necessary to arrive at truths regarding God, and compared to Torah, it offers this knowledge in a more direct form of reflecting a Creator, through creation.

NOAH'S ARK: TWO MISSIONS

A friend questioned an apparent repetition in the verses, when comparing Genesis 7:6-10 to Genesis 7:11-16. In both accounts, we read of Noah's age, the commencement of the Flood, that he and his entire family entered the ark, and that the animals came in pairs. Why this repetition?

However, as would be expected upon closer examination, we find many distinctions between these two accounts. Contrast A1 to A2, B1 to B2 etc. in the sets of verses below:

24) Rambam, Yesodei HaTorah 2.2

GENESIS 7:6-10

(A1) :6: *“And Noah was 600 years old...”*

(B1) 7:7: *“And Noah entered...due to the Flood”*

(C1) 7:8: *“From the pure animals”*

(D1) 7:9: *“Two of each came to Noah, male and female...”*

GENESIS 7:11-16

(A2) 7:11: *“In the 600th year of Noah’s life...”*

(B2) 7:13: *“On that very day, Noah entered...”*

(C2) 7:14: *“And all animals according to their species...”*

(D2) 7:15: *“Two of each came; all that possessed life...”*

Why these distinctions? Not only in the description of the Flood event itself do we find discrepancies, but previously, in God’s original command, there too we find two, distinct accounts.

In verses 6:18-22 we find God commanding Noah to enter two of each species, with no mention of “pure and impure” animals, but simply, to sustain their “species.” God also commands Noah to take food for his sustenance. Only later in verses 7:1-2, do we read, *“And God said to Noah, ‘come, you*

and your entire household to the ark, because you I have seen as righteous before Me in this generation. From all the pure animals take seven each, male and his mate, and from the animals that are not pure, two, male and his mate.” There is a clear distinction between God’s two commands. First, God addresses the issues of “species” and “Noah’s sustenance.” Later, in a separate address, God refers to the “pure and impure” animals; His appellation “male and its mate” is seen (regarding animals); and also we read of Noah’s “righteousness.” (The Rabbis teach us that the seven pure animals were required, as Noah was to offer sacrifices with them. What does this teach us?)

The alignment of Noah’s fulfillment of God’s word and the pure animals is indicative. Similarly joined previously in God’s command is God’s aligning of Noah’s righteousness, and the mention of pure animals. In another other matter, we find a correlation between God’s command that Noah take food, and the reference to animals as species, not as pure or impure.

It appears there are two distinct goals in the Flood. I suggest that God had two plans; 1) the survival of human and animal life, and, 2) sustaining man as a servant of God. I say this, as God addresses Noah two distinct times. His first ad-

dress refers to animal life as a “species,” and He urges Noah to take food for all. Here, God outlines the first goal in the plan of the flood, i.e. that human and animal life continue, “as an ends in itself.” This is a subtle point, but quite interesting: God desired – for whatever reason – that life continue, aside from the second goal that man perfect himself. Why else would God address this aspect, separate from the second address? Only afterwards do we read that God noted Noah’s righteousness, and referring to animals as pure and impure. What is this element of “purity” to teach us? This is what the Rabbis stated, that the animals have a future purpose of sacrifice, which is dependent upon animal purity. God aligns Noah’s righteousness and animal purity to teach of a second goal in the ark, i.e., that man exist to serve God. Sacrifice is the service of God.

There are two distinct goals in the ark; 1) sustaining all life, 2) enabling man’s perfection. The reason this is startling, is that we read, *“The heavens, are heavens to God, but the Earth He gave to the sons of man (Psalms, 115:16).”* This indicates that the Earth is solely for the goal of man’s perfection. If this is so, how can there be a separate goal in the ark of sustaining life, independent of man’s perfection? How can there be two goals? There should be only one goal for the Earth: man’s perfection!

On this verse in Psalms, Radak writes the following:

And those lacking knowledge think, that man's dominion in the Earth, is akin to God's dominion in the heavens, but they do not speak properly. For the kingship of God, over all does He reign. Rather, the explanation of "but the Earth He gave to the sons of man" (is) that man is like an appointee of God in the Earth, over all therein, and all is at the word of God.

It appears that Radak denounces the view that the Earth has a singular goal: that it exists solely for man. Yes, God did instruct man to "subdue" the Earth,²⁵ but neither this statement, nor the verse in Psalms, indicates a "singular" purpose of the Earth. These two verses teach a purpose, not of the Earth, but of man, i.e., that this Earth be used by him in his pursuit of perfection. However, the Earth may have another purpose aside from man's goal of perfection. It sounds contradictory, but it is not.

Mankind may exist under two frameworks; 1) as a reflection of God's wisdom, and 2) for his own perfection. It appears to me that this explains the two accounts of God's command

²⁵) Gen. 1:28

that the ark be built and life be spared. The first account teaches the objective that life be spared, for the sake of life itself. The second account teaches that due to Noah's righteousness, aside from the sustaining of life for itself, man will be spared for the "second" purpose: that he perfects himself. There are two goals in the existence of life: 1) that life exists as a reflection of God's wisdom, and 2) that man perfect himself. One goal is not dependent upon the other. Life, including man, may exist, even if man does not perfect himself, provided he does not corrupt his ways too far.

Radak says man is merely "appointed" over the Earth. What is the status of an "appointee," an overseer? This means that God created the Earth, and He then appoints man over this creation, perhaps indicating that the Earth was created for one purpose, even without man, and only afterwards was man given subsequent rule. And if man may lose his position, the Earth appears to still serve some purpose. I do not know to which other goal Earth ascribes, but we do read that the angels' praises of God include their praises of God's Earth. This means that the angels – what ever they may be – give purpose to the Earth, as the Earth is a means through which they laud the Creator. Without man, the Earth still serves this purpose.

There is another account which I feel may be related. In the Musaf prayer of Yom Kippur, the angels question the death of the Ten Martyrs as follows: *“This is the Torah, and this is its reward?”* To this, God replies, *“If I hear another sound, I will turn the universe into water.”* God says that He will destroy the universe if the angels do not accept the death sentence of the Ten Martyrs. How do we understand this dialogue?

Perhaps, this teaches that if the angels do not accept God’s unfathomable wisdom, as expressed in this case, then the universe forfeits its purpose. God’s destruction will ensue, as the universe serves no purpose. This is in line with our answer, that aside from man’s purpose of perfection, the universe serves to attest to God’s wisdom. Man’s existence, as part of the universe, may serve a purpose, other than his own. God said that the universe would be destroyed if the angels are not silent. This means that if there is not some being which accepts God’s unfathomable wisdom, only then does the universe serve no purpose. But provided the angels accept God’s rule, the universe serves some purpose.

In the verses quoted above, we read of the second account recording the Flood, but divorced from mankind as the goal. Although he is included in the description of the events surrounding of the Flood, Noah is not referred to as a subject

of the Flood, but merely as a reference for the time line. Animals are not referred to as “pure” — a term applicable only in relation to man — but as “species”, something divorced from man.

We see two accounts of the Flood: both, in God’s command, and in the description of the Flood as it occurred. In God’s first command, animals are only referred to as “species,” and Noah is simply told to take food for survival, as if to underline one goal: the survival of life. In God’s second address, (7:1 states again, “And God said...”) Noah’s righteousness is first mentioned, and so is the “purity” element of the animals. It appears there is a second goal: man’s perfection. When describing the Flood itself, in its first account, (Gen. 7:6-10) animals are referred to as “pure and impure,” pointing to man’s future sacrifices, man’s perfection. In the second account (Gen. 7:11-16) animals are referred to as “species” and in this account, Noah’s righteousness is omitted.

Could it be that the Earth — including man — also exists for some goal, other than mankind’s own perfection? Can both man and the universe exist, not just for man, but for another goal, that God’s wisdom be reflected not only through the cosmos, but through all Earthly, plant life, minerals, animals...and man? I do not know for certain, but the aforemen-

tioned distinctions incline me to consider that human existence, besides offering man an opportunity for perfection, might also offer the angels another display of God's wisdom through which they extol the Creator.

DIVINE DREAMS AND THEIR LESSONS

When studying Joseph's dreams and interpretations, the analogy of a genius painter comes to mind. This painter would arrange millions of paint specks on a single paintbrush. Then, using only one stroke, he would move his brush across a blank canvas. Suddenly, a beautiful scene would emerge; trees with colorful leaves, birds in flight, sun and clouds, mountains, and streams. A passerby witnessing the picture-perfect scene emerge with one stroke would be in awe of how with one action, this painter anticipated how all the paint specks would fall into place and create a perfectly harmonious and picturesque scene. God's two dreams granted to the young Joseph paint such a picture.

When he was 17, Joseph dreamt of eleven sheaves bowing

to his. And then in another dream, he saw eleven stars and the sun and moon bowing to him. Even after seeing his brothers' dismay at his retelling the first dream, Joseph nonetheless felt compelled for some reason to repeat his second dream to his brothers and his father, in a second recounting. It was due to these dreams that the brothers conspired to kill Joseph; eventually selling him instead. It was his father who rejected the dream's apparent interpretation that they would all bow to Joseph; the eleven stars being his eleven brothers, and the sun and moon representing Joseph's parental figures. At this stage, it does not appear that Joseph offered his own interpretation. Yet, thirteen years later, astonishingly, Joseph interprets not only the dreams of Pharaoh's stewards, but also Pharaoh's dreams. All four dreams came true exactly! But how did Joseph know their interpretations? This question is strengthened by Joseph's apparent lack of interpretative skills with regards to his own two dreams. And many of the Torah commentaries including Ramban and Klay Yakkar do not suggest Joseph was Divinely inspired with the interpretations: he succeeded in interpreting each dream solely through wisdom.

Later on, when his brothers descended to Egypt to purchase food during the famine, the brothers do not recognize

the now 39-year-old, bearded Joseph standing before them. It is suggested that a denial of this Egyptian viceroy truly being Joseph was generated from the brothers' rejection of any success Joseph would attain; having been humiliated by his brothers, they were sure Joseph was permanently psychologically crippled from long ago.

When Joseph sees his brothers, he "recalls the dreams." According to a wise Rabbi, this means that Joseph understood he was to follow the Divine license provided by these dreams to subjugate his brothers into repentance: when the brothers "bow" to Joseph for wheat, he was thereby permitted to make them bow to him in higher matters, i.e., perfection (illustrated by the dream of the stars, higher matters). Creating a situation where the youngest Benjamin would be imprisoned on false charges, Joseph orchestrated a replica of his very own sale to force his brothers into a parallel dilemma: would they abandon the accused Benjamin now, who ostensibly stole Joseph's goblet, as they had done 20 years earlier when they sold Joseph? Or, would they display complete repentance, and sacrifice themselves for their brother? Normally, one is not permitted to place anyone under such a trial, but Joseph recognized his dreams as Divine in origin; a license to perfect his brothers. As this wise Rabbi taught, the

first dream of the brothers' sheaves bowing to him – physical dominance – was the precursor for Joseph's dominance over them in the spiritual realm – symbolized by the eleven stars, sun and moon bowing to him. The first dream was meant by God to teach Joseph that when the brothers would bow to him for food, Joseph thereby received permission to rule over them in regards to their perfection, symbolized by higher bodies: the luminaries.

Subsequent to his dreams, Joseph understood their meaning; and not necessarily 39 years later when he first saw his brothers, but perhaps much earlier. The Torah only tells us that he recalled the dreams upon seeing his brothers, to teach that this was when he would act upon those dreams. But their interpretation may have preceded this by many years.

We must now ask this: when did Joseph become such a great interpreter? He was in prison most of the time in Egypt, and he didn't seem to offer interpretation to his own dreams at 17 years of age. From where did Joseph obtain such knowledge of dreams, that he would eventually interpret his dreams, the dreams of Pharaoh's stewards, and Pharaoh's dreams, with exact precision? We are aware of the Torah's description of Joseph as "*ben zekunim*" or as Onkelos translates, "a wise son." Jacob taught Joseph all the knowledge he attained at the Ye-

shiva of Shem and Aver. Perhaps this included lessons Jacob learned from his own dream of the ladder, and maybe others. So at the very outset, Joseph was a wise individual. We also wonder why God gave these two dreams to Joseph, as they apparently contributed, if not caused, Joseph's sale. But we cannot approach God's true intent without His saying so. However, we can study, and perhaps suggest possibilities...

DREAMS: AFFECTING HISTORY & PERFECTION

God is perfectly just. He would not jeopardize Joseph's life or well being, had Joseph's nature not warranted this sale. We learn that Joseph beautified himself. He also reported his brother's wrongdoings to his father. He had an egoistic tendency, which was rightfully corrected as God humbled him in prison for many years. He publicized his dreams attracting unnecessary jealousy upon himself, which culminated in his sale and ultimately, his imprisonment. Thus, with Joseph's dreams, God clearly intended to perfect him. But that was not the only reason for the dreams. As we mentioned, the genius painter performed one stroke of his brush, and created a perfect picture with tremendous detail. God's dreams given to Joseph also had many ramifications.

The wise Rabbi I mentioned taught that the dreams also provided an opportunity for the brothers' repentance, as Joseph was licensed through the dreams to place them into this trial regarding Benjamin. Simultaneously, this forced Jacob to part with Benjamin, perfecting Jacob as well, by helping him restrain his excessive love for Benjamin, displaced from his beloved, departed wife Rachel. And we see that Joseph's plan is successful. As Rashi states, when Joseph embraced his father after all those years, we would think Jacob equally embraced his son Joseph. But he did not: he was pre-occupied "reciting the Shema." Of course the Shema (Torah phrases) did not yet exist, but this metaphor means Joseph's plan to perfect his father worked: Jacob no longer directed his excessive love towards man, but now, towards God. He re-channeled his passions towards the Creator, as should be done. The dreams perfected Joseph by contributing to his sale and refinement of his ego; they enabled Joseph to perfect his brothers by forcing them to defend Benjamin, and they perfected his father as well, forcing him to break his bond to Rachel, now displaced onto her son Benjamin. We might think these matters alone are amazing, that two dreams might offer so much good for so many. However, there is a great deal more to Joseph's dreams. Something even more astonishing...

DREAM INSTRUCTION

We asked earlier how Joseph transformed into such a brilliant dream interpreter. How did he know that the dreams of the stewards and Pharaoh were Divine? What did Joseph know about dreams? All he had were his two dreams years earlier. Soon thereafter he was cast into prison for over a decade. However, those dreams offered Joseph more than we think.

What was Joseph doing in prison this entire time? Of course he must have had chores, and he was promoted to oversee the other inmates. But he had his solitude as well...time to think.

Having received tremendous knowledge from his father, the teachings of Shem and Aver, Joseph gained deep insight into how God rules the world, and interacts with mankind. He knew the concept of repentance, for he was soon to be the conductor of his family's repentance. He must have reflected on his own state, pondering his own repentance, "Why am I in prison? What is my sin?" He soon realized his dreams precipitated his descent into slavery, and that God gave him these dreams. He analyzed his dreams, and must have spent many hours, days, and weeks studying God's precise communications of the night. What did he discover?

PHARAOH AND HIS STEWARDS

Ten years elapsed in prison. One day, Joseph saw the wine steward and baker troubled by their dreams, and he invited them to recount them to him. Joseph interpreted both dreams exactly in line with what happened: the wine steward was returned to his post, and the baker was hung. Two more years go by, and Joseph finds himself before Pharaoh. Pharaoh heard of Joseph's interpretive skills, and he too told Joseph his dreams. Again, Joseph interprets the dreams with exact precision; they come true. But if God did not tell Joseph the future, how did he know it? We now arrive at the core of the issue...

TWO DIVINE SIGNS: DREAMER & DUPLICATION

God's dreams granted to Joseph contained content, but they were also "instructive." I believe God gave Joseph two dreams for objectives in addition to perfecting his family and himself. Besides the "content" of the dreams, Prophetic dreams also have a "style:" the chosen dream recipient, and dream duplication.

Pharaoh received these dreams, and none other. He also received “two” dreams. Ramban states that two separate but similar dreams are unnatural: Pharaoh could have naturally seen both of his dreams in one single dream state.²⁶ However, Pharaoh woke up and dreamt similar content again as it was Divinely inspired. The same rule applies to the two stewards who dreamt similar dreams. And Joseph knew this. Joseph also had two separate dreams with similar content.²⁷ In Numbers 12:6 Ibn Ezra teaches that duplication in dreams indicates their Divine origin: “[Divine] dreams are doubled, as is the manner of prophecies.”

Joseph had many years to ponder his situation in prison, and much of what he may have pondered was the last event leading him into prison: his dreams while still at home. He knew they were from God, as he tells his brothers years later: “God sent me before you to place for you a remnant in the land and to sustain you (Gen. 45:7).”

What did Joseph determine were indicative of Divine dreams? He recognized dream duplication was unnatural. He also recognized that his dreams affected his perfection, so the “recipient” also indicates Divine intent. These two elements were contained in the stewards’ dreams, and in Pha-

26) Ramban, Gen. 41:32

27) Gen. 37:9

raohs dreams. The stewards' dream duplications were a variation, but no less telling of their Divine nature, since they both occurred the very same night, to two individuals. Pharaoh also had two dreams, and of additional significance, it was "Pharaoh" – the man with the wherewithal to address the forecasted famine – who received the dreams.

Joseph understood from his own experience that dream duplication, and as I learned from a wise Rabbi, a strategic dream "recipient" are two indications of Divine dreams. So convinced was Joseph of their Divine origin that the recipient is of a telling nature, Joseph said to Pharaoh, "*What God plans He has told to Pharaoh (Gen. 41:25).*" Joseph meant to say, "Your reception of this dream as opposed to another indicates its Divine nature." And Joseph repeats this in verse 28.

Had God not granted Joseph these two Divine dreams, Joseph would not have pondered dreams. He would not necessarily have studied their style, to the point that he was able to facilitate the good outcome God desired, by emancipating himself through the stewards' interpretations, and rising to viceroy through applying his wisdom to Pharaoh's dreams.

GOD'S BRILLIANT DREAM STRATEGY

God used dreams not only to perfect Jacob's household, but also to train Joseph in dream design and interpretation... the very matter essential for carving out Jewish history. The design of Joseph's dreams contained the blueprint for determining the Divine nature of the other dreams he would confront. In other words: his dreams were actually dream instructions, not just messages. This is akin to a coded message, where the message content is one lesson, but the textual arrangement also contains hints to decipher this new language. Joseph's dreams' "content" contained a message for directing his perfecting of his family. But the dream "design" (selected recipient and duplication) taught him how to unravel dreams in general.

With a single brush stroke of Joseph's dreams, 1) God placed Joseph in prison to humble him; 2) He caused the brothers to repent, this time not abandoning their youngest brother; 3) He caused Jacob to perfect his excessive love; and 4) He trained Joseph in the art of dream interpretation... the science essential for the aforementioned perfections of Jacob, his sons, and Joseph!

The very dreams that caused Joseph's imprisonment, also

provided his escape, and helped sustain that generation. We appreciate God's brilliance: with one action He effectuates the greatest good for so many. We also realize that without Joseph's appreciation that God teaches man with sublime wisdom, Joseph would not have engaged his own wisdom to discern God's will, nor would Joseph acquire the dream interpretation skills he discovered while in prison. But since Joseph had such deep knowledge of how God works, he turned all his efforts while in prison to analyzing his dreams, using wisdom to 1) uncover God's message, and 2) study dream style so as to determine which dreams are Divine, and how to interpret them.

A FIFTH MESSAGE

Additionally, dreams are, by definition, a manifestation of "hidden" material. Understanding this, Joseph knew that if God communicates with His Prophets in dreams²⁸, it is for this reason. God wishes to indicate that just as dreams conceal deeper ideas, so too do God's dreams, and even more so. God's selected mode of communicating with His Prophets via dreams underscores the principle that God's words too

28) Num. 12:6

must undergo man's interpretation, if the intended message is to be discovered. With that appreciation, Joseph delved into the study of dreams, both prophetic and mundane. He also determined that dreams of Divine origin contain a code, and once detected, can be understood. Joseph knew that wisdom is how God designed the world. Therefore, it is only with wisdom that man succeeds.

A LIFE OF WISDOM

Joseph's approach to life was based on his knowledge that God created all. Thus, the world "naturally" functions according to God's wisdom. Despite the fact that God did not reveal Pharaoh's or his stewards' interpretations, Joseph secured perfection and sustenance for his family, and all of Egypt and surrounding peoples using wisdom alone. Since wisdom guided his actions, he was not in conflict with God's world that functions according to that same wisdom. Rather, he was perfectly in line with it, as his successes teach.

We too can perceive God's wisdom if we earnestly seek it out from His Torah. Wisdom is the key to success and happiness in all areas. We do not need God telling us anything

more, or sending signs, just like Joseph did not need God to interpret the dreams. In fact, God has already intervened by giving His Torah to us all.

Responding to our misfortunes with “religious” beliefs that “it’s all for the good,” man deceives himself, and will repeat his errors. It is only through analyzing our ways and seeing if they match Torah ideals that we will terminate our need to falsely pacify ourselves with “it’s all for the good.” Using reason in all areas, and admitting our errors with a responsible analysis teamed with internal change, we can engage wisdom to steer us to the truly good path, one that God wills for all mankind, and is readily available without further intervention.

The Torah contains all we need. No quick fixes, amulets, or blessings will address our concerns. God says we require wisdom and personal perfection.

For only with this may one glorify himself: understand and know Me; for I am Hashem who does kindness, justice and righteousness in land, for in these I desire, so says Hashem (Jeremiah 9:23).

IDOLATRY: A SIN OF THE MIND

In the days of a Enosh²⁹ the children of man made a great error and the council of the wise men of that generation was foolish, and Enosh himself was of those who erred. And this was their error...they said, "Since God created these stars and the planets to guide the world, and He placed them in the heights [heaven] and He apportioned to them honor, and they are servants that minister before Him, they are fitting to praise and to glorify, and to apportion to them honor. And this is the will of God, blessed be He: to make great and to honor those who He makes great and that He honors, just like a king wills those who stand before him to be honored and this is the honor of the king. Since they entertained this thing on their hearts, they started to build temples to the stars and to offer sacrifices to them and to praise them and glorify them with the words and prostration in front of them in order to attain the will of the Creator, as they corruptly thought. And this is the essence of star worship. And similarly spoke the worshippers who knew the core ways of idolatry. It

29) Adam the First's grandson

is not that they said that there is no God except for this star...it is as Jeremiah said, "Who would not fear You, O king of the nations? For it befits You; forasmuch as among all the wise men of the nations, and in all their royalty, there is none like You. But they are altogether brutish and foolish: the vanities by which they are instructed are but wood."³⁰ This is to say that all knew that You are the one God, but their error and their foolishness was that they imagined that this futility [star worship] is Your will. (Maimonides' Laws of Star Worship 1:1)

Maimonides opens his treatment of idolatry with history, describing the very inception of idolatrous practice committed by Enosh, the grandson of Adam the First. Why is this history appropriate for a book that formulates practical laws?

Citing the initial case of idolatry, we thereby learn that idolatrous practice is not a cultural phenomenon alone, but at its core, is a belief generated from man's psyche. Enosh and his generation had no prior idolatry to adopt; they invented it. Perhaps to emphasize this sin as internally generated, Mai-

30 Jeremiah 10:7,8

monides refers to mankind as “the “children of man.” Meaning, it is the human condition that life starts with childhood which generates idolatrous tendencies. That is, man starts life as a helpless, needy infant, depending on his parents 100%. The infant is completely insecure, and runs to the parents to keep him safe, feed him, carry him, and simply be there in plain sight, which offers psychological comfort. The infant views his parents as super beings.

As man matures, he learns that his parents in fact are not superior. A healthy individual will abandon his infantile view of his parents as superior. But many people have difficulty releasing their attachment to the infantile parent image. Such individuals seek a replacement in the form of other physical images, onto whom they can project a pristine and powerful aura, just as they viewed their parents during their infancy. Jesus, Rebbes, amulets, idols, the Gold Calf and even stars were deified in an attempt to replace the very physical parental role. It is no wonder why celebrities are called “stars.” So alluring is the need for a tangible superior figure, numerous Torah commands exist to address this very problem. During the Gold Calf sin, God records the people saying, “Moses the man who took us out of Egypt, we know not what happened

to him.”³¹ Of course Moses is a “man!” But the people said this as a clear expression of their fear, their loss of the “image” of a leader. Relating to the abstract non-physical God was too difficult. Their creation of a Gold Calf intended to replace the physical Moses, the “man.”

Another reason for citing this historical record – focussing on man’s faulty thinking – is due to the very violation: this is a sin of mind.³² The mental acceptance of anything other than God deserving praise, is the core violation. The Rabbis teach that the first and second commands in the 10 Commandments are relegated to the mind: they are accepting God and rejecting idolatry. Thus, the very belief in anything other than God is the crime. Other commands involve speech and action.

But there is more to the writings of a brilliant thinker like Maimonides than mere history and law. Maimonides uses a code of repetition to highlight his message. What matters did he repeat? Look over that law again before continuing, so you might detect this.

31) Exod. 32:1

32) Active worship is needed only to enable courts to mete out punishments.

GOD'S WILL

Maimonides mentioned the words “will,” “error” and that “man said” about 4 times each. He does this to highlight the core issue: man imagined what was God’s will. Man did not seek evidence in reality. Herein lies the error. Maimonides states a few times that man misconstrued what God desires. But man can only determine this based either on God’s expressed communication (which they did not receive about stars) or what man witnesses in the universe. And there is no evidence in the universe that God desires man to worship the stars. This was a faulty conclusion: assuming what is in God’s mind, without evidence. This, Maimonides teaches, is the “essence” of star worship. To highlight that the error was one of thought, Maimonides also repeats that man “said” something, meaning, he arrived at a conclusion. Man did not follow reality, but instead, he followed his fantasy. Man’s fantasy creates things that are not real, luring man to believe in those imaginations. God’s will is in direct opposition: man follows his internal fantasies, but God planted eyes and ears in man precisely so we use them to determine what exists, and what does not. When rejecting astrology in his Letter to Marseilles, Maimonides makes this so clear:

It is not proper for a man to accept as trustworthy anything other than one of these three things. The first is a thing for which there is a clear proof deriving from man's reasoning – such as arithmetic' geometry, and astronomy. The second is a thing that a man perceives through one of the five senses – such as when he knows with certainty that this is red and this is black and the like through the sight of his eye; or as when he tastes that this is bitter and this is sweet; or as when he feels that this is hot and this is cold; or as when he hears that this sound is clear and this sound is indistinct; or as when he smells that this is a pleasing smell and this is a displeasing smell and the like. The third is a thing that a man receives from the prophets or from the righteous. 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 tradition, and this because of sense-perception, and this on grounds of reason." Anyone who accepts as trustworthy anything that is not of these three species, of him it is said, "The simple believes everything (Prov. 14:15)."

Maimonides makes it clear that the star worshippers did not reject God, but they erred about God's will. How much more sinful is it to make an error about God Himself? Yet, today, many believe that God became a man (Christianity), that God permeates all matter (pantheism) and other nonsense. Recently a Rabbi of a large orthodox shul made this very pantheistic claim. We call this "nonsense" since there is "no sense" that validates such erroneous and heretical thoughts. Worse, is that such beliefs contradict God's words. For He taught us through His prophets that He is not similar to anything: *"To what shall you equate Me that I should be similar, says God (Isaiah, 40:25)."* Thus, He cannot be a man, and He does not occupy space, so as to be "everywhere" or "in everything." Becoming man or occupying space would render God similar to other things, whereas God said He is unlike anything.

Understanding Maimonides' opening remarks, we appreciate the origins of Christianity and pantheism are found in man's psyche. Christianity satisfies man with the infantile father image in a tangible form. And pantheism caters to those limited minds who cannot accept an existence outside of the familiar time-space universe. So they force a definition

of God into a spatial fantasy, claiming “God is everywhere.” And those who feel God literally permeates all matter, reject that God created the world from nothing as Torah teaches, for they suggest God and matter are one, and therefore, matter is eternal. Others feel God is degraded if something exists “outside” of Him.

We must be thankful to God for keeping His promise³³ that the Torah would never cease to be with us. God’s words offer us absolute truth, and His words reject Christianity, pantheism, star worship and all forms of alien beliefs and worship. We are thankful that Maimonides toiled to safeguard for us great truths. He engages our minds with his formulations, borrowed from the Torah’s coded methods, such as repetition, which leads us to the essential lesson that idolatry is a sin of the mind. This is why he commenced with *“children of man made a great error and the council of the wise men of that generation was foolish.”* Maimonides immediately conveys the core issue in idolatry to be an “error” and “foolishness;” matters of the mind. Following Maimonides, let us use our intelligence, our senses and our Torah to determine and accept only what is real and true.

33) Isaiah 59:21

INTERRUPTION

ABRAHAM AND THE ANGELS

One must repeatedly revisit Torah portions to uncover God's numerous lessons. What catches our attention during our first few reads of a given area, often obscures other questions and insights. However, if we follow the halacha of reading each weekly portion twice yearly, and we are fortunate, new questions arise leading to new discoveries. I will address the account of Abraham and the angels, following God's words that all prophets excluding Moses received prophecy only while unconscious.³⁴

Three angels visit Abraham. We read five times how fast Abraham "ran" and "hurried" to prepare a meal for these guests, described as men. What is God's intent in, 1) giving a vision to Abraham that highlights Abraham's kindness to people, and 2) repeating how fast and attentively Abraham served them? Since God ultimately discusses directly with Abraham the justice of Sodom, of what purpose is this vision of the three men?

Only one angel appears required for this vision, since only its news of Isaac's forthcoming birth was announced. The

34) "...If there will be prophets of God; in a vision to him I will make Myself known; in a dream I will speak to him. Not so is it with My servant Moses; in all My house he is trusted. Face to face I speak with him and in vision and not with riddles; and the form of God he beholds... (Num. 12:6-8)."

other two angels were silent the entire visit and could have initially “arrived”³⁵ at Sodom. The Rabbis teach that the other two angels had the respective missions of destroying Sodom and saving Lote. This being the case, there was no need for them to accompany the angel assigned with the mission of the birth announcement. What then was the purpose of the two other angels visiting Abraham?

One angel asked Abraham, “*Where is Sarah your wife?*” We would assume this was intended to call her to share the news. But this did not occur. As Abraham responded, “*She is in the tent*”, the angel then announced only to Abraham the news of Isaac. Why then did the angel inquire of Sarah’s whereabouts? It appears inconsequential. The Torah then tells us that Sarah “in fact” heard, as she was behind the angels. She denied her ability to become pregnant at ninety years old. God then ridicules Sarah addressing Abraham, “*Is anything impossible for God?*” As Abraham was alone in communion with God, what purpose was served by God including Sarah’s words in this created vision? (Although this was Abraham’s vision, God accurately depicts Sarah’s true feelings, which no

35) I say “arrived”, but in no manner do I suggest that angels are an earthly phenomenon. Rather, as I elaborated within this essay, that the two other angels could have “addressed” God’s will for Sodom without connection with the announcing angel. (Similarly, the angels of God addressed God’s will that the pillar of cloud relocate behind the Jews. But angels are not on Earth; only the cloud is. See Maimonides’ Guide for the Perplexed, book II, end of chapter 6.)

doubt, Abraham discussed with Sarah in his waking state subsequent to this prophecy. For she too would be instrumental in transmitting God's justice. Alternatively, Sarah might have very well participated in this prophecy; similar to when God gave a joint prophecy to Miriam, Aaron and Moses³⁶.)

This is followed by the angels "gazing at Sodom", but not yet leaving. Their departure is suddenly delayed, and interrupted by God's following consideration:

Shall I keep hidden from Abraham what I plan to do? And Abraham will surely become a great, mighty nation, and all nations of the land will be blessed due to him. For he is beloved on account that he will command his children and his household after him, and they will guard the path of God, performing charity and justice, so that God will bring upon Abraham what He has spoken. And God said [to Abraham], "The cry of Sodom and Amora is great and their sin is greatly heavy. I will descend and see if in accordance with their cry that comes to Me I will annihilate them; and if not, I know" (Gen. 18:17-21).

36) Num. 12:4

Following God's words, we read in the very next verse (ibid 18:22) that the angels then left to Sodom. Again, the angels gazing towards Sodom should be immediately followed by their leaving. What is the meaning behind God's words above interrupting the angels' departure? And what is God's message here?

ABRAHAM'S CONCERN FOR MAN

Why the emphasis of Abraham "running" and "hurrying" the meal preparations? Abraham was having a vision, and to him, he was relating to men, not angels, as the verses state. Abraham had a keen sense of kindness, and wished to give honor to his fellow man. One can serve others, but if he runs to serve them, this expresses the height of honoring others, as we see regarding Rivka "running" to draw water for Eliezer's camels³⁷. One feels more appreciated when another person runs to assist them, and does not merely walk. Abraham wanted to make the three men feel as appreciated as possible. Abraham prized human dignity. Typically, a leader seeks honor. But the perfected leader views all others as equals, and even forgoes personal rights and feelings to accommodate others. But why was this part of the vision

37) Gen. 24:20

God created? How is this related to Abraham learning God's justice?

Men such as Abraham, who are genuinely concerned for his fellow, and who teach others God's ways of "charity and justice"³⁸ will be the recipient of greater knowledge in this area. God therefore teaches Abraham not only His ways, but also, that man (Abraham) earns this knowledge due to his acts of kindness to his fellow. Thus, Abraham sees himself showing kindness to the three men, and this is followed by God's dialogue on Sodom's justice. God says in other words, "Abraham, due to your kindness, justice and concern for mankind, I am revealing greater knowledge with you on how My true kindness and justice operate."

ANGELS

Angels are not omniscient; they are God's metaphysical agents to perform events on Earth. As King David said, "*He makes His angels winds; His ministers [He makes as] blazing flames (Psalms 104:4).*" Each angel controls a particular sphere within natural law, and nothing outside that law. As Rashi taught, "*...one angel does not perform two missions (Gen.*

38) Gen. 18:19

18:2).” We also read, “*And the angel of God that went before the Jewish camp traveled, and it went behind them; and the pillar of cloud that went before them traveled and stood behind them (Exod. 14:19).*” There is no redundancy. This verse teaches a fundamental: there are two entities: 1) the metaphysical angel, and 2) the physical entity (here, a cloud) over which God places the angel as a supervisor. God controls nature through an angel, charging the angel over a specific sphere of nature; here, the specific task of repositioning the cloud to protect the Jews from the approaching Egyptian army. Thus, angels themselves are not physical, but they control physical phenomena. This explains why this verse describes the angel traveling, and then again, the cloud traveling. We are taught that the angel controls the cloud. And angels only control the sphere of laws determined by God. Thus, the angel did not know where Sarah was and needed to ask, since this knowledge was outside its specific sphere of control. Yet, the angel somehow knew Sarah’s name. This I believe further proves that this story was a vision. For if it were a literal event and these three were men and not angels, they could not know Sarah’s name.

The angel did not intend to share the birth announcement with Sarah. It is my opinion that it was ascertaining that

Sarah was not in earshot of this announcement. The angel's inquiry "*Where is Sarah your wife?*" is understood as ensuring she did not hear the birth announcement. Why? I believe this teaches another lesson about God's justice. For it was Abraham who taught monotheism and God's justice to his children and mankind.³⁹ Therefore, the news of Isaac's birth – the son who would continue Abraham's legacy – related primarily to Abraham, and not Sarah.

THE VISION

This entire vision dealt with God's justice. Justice is not merely the destruction of evildoers. A primary aspect of God's justice is educating man about His ways. Therefore, the two other angels, although silent the entire time, came along with the announcing angel to convey a relationship between all three angels. Isaac's birth was vital to continue Abraham's teachings, and the destruction of Sodom and Lote's salvation comprise important lessons on God's justice, the very substance of Abraham's teachings. Thus, all three angels' missions related to Abraham, and therefore were all part of this vision.

39) Gen. 18:18

THE INTERRUPTION: GOD'S DIALOGUE WITH ABRAHAM

God's will is to teach man. The angels were about to leave to Sodom, but not quite yet. First, God shares with Abraham a clue to greater knowledge of God's justice. This knowledge would have been "hidden" from mankind — "*Hamichaseh ani may'Avraham (Gen. 18:17)*" — had God not suggested to Abraham that although exceedingly great in sin, Sodom might be salvaged if certain conditions were met. God knew there were not 10 righteous people, and therefore the angels proceeded to destroy Sodom, prior to Abraham's dialogue with God. But the message of the angels not departing to Sodom until God commenced a dialogue with Abraham indicates that the angel's mission of destruction played a great role in Abraham's knowledge of God's justice. The sequence of events, then, is as follows:

- 1) God is about to destroy Sodom; the angels gaze at Sodom).
- 2) But God first shares knowledge of His justice before doing so. Once this dialogue ensues,
- 3) the angles depart to Sodom; the destruction can take place, and Abraham will attain greater knowledge.

Again, God's dialogue is inserted between the angels' gaze towards Sodom and their departure for Sodom, conveying a relationship between Sodom's destruction and Abraham learning God's justice.

SARAH

What purpose did Sarah serve in this vision? The Torah makes it clear that Sarah viewed natural law as absolute, "*After I have aged, will I truly give birth (Gen. 18:14)?*" Thus, God's response, "*Is anything too wondrous for God (Gen. 18:14)?*" The lesson to Abraham by God's inclusion of this scenario within the vision is this: knowledge of God's justice must include the idea that God's justice is absolute. Nothing – not even nature – overrides God's justice. This is expressed throughout Torah in the many miracles God performed to benefit righteous people. As God was teaching Abraham new insights into His justice, this lesson was of critical value.

SUMMARY

God gives Abraham a vision intended to further educate him on His ways, and for him to teach his son Isaac and the world. But God only does so, since Abraham was perfected

in his concern for man. Abraham is taught through the vision that this concern is what earned him new insights from God. The other two angels visiting Abraham, and the interruption of the angels' departure by God's dialogue, teaches that man's knowledge of God's justice is a primary purpose in His meting out of justice. Thus, the angels did not leave to destroy Sodom until Abraham was engaged in learning a new insight into God's justice in this destruction. Abraham also learns that God's justice is absolute, expressed in God's rebuke of Sarah.

ADDENDUM

Although it is suggested that Abraham was pleading with God for the salvation of Sodom, the verses do not suggest this. I say this due to the absence of Abraham mentioning "selicha" or "mechila," meaning to forgive. It is my opinion that Abraham accepted God's decree, and was inquiring for his edification, what exactly are God's measures of justice. In contrast, Moses poses arguments to God that once He selected the Jewish nation, favored by His salvation, annihilation of the Jews would cast shame on God. This was not the case regarding Sodom.

ANOMALIES

A MOUNTAIN ABLAZE

In Deuteronomy, long after the event, Moses recalls elements of Revelation at Sinai. Interesting, he makes numerous mentions of one particular aspect:

And God spoke to you from inside the fire, a voice of words did you hear, and no form did you see, only a voice (4:12).

And be exceedingly careful regarding your souls, for you did not see any form the day God spoke to you in Horeb from inside the fire (4:16).

Has any people heard the voice of God speaking from inside the fire, and survived, as you have (4:33)?

From the heavens He made heard His voice to train you, and on Earth He showed you His great fire, and His words you heard from inside the fire (4:36).

Face to face, God spoke with you on the mountain from inside the fire (5:4).

These matters God spoke to your entire assembly on the mountain from inside the fire... (5:19).

...and you said "And His voice we heard from inside the fire"... (5:21).

For who of all flesh has heard the voice of the living God speaking from inside the fire, and survived, as us (5:23)?

And God gave to me two tablets of stone written with the finger of God, and upon them, as all the words that God spoke with you on the mountain from inside the fire on the day of the assembly (9:10).

What is so significant about fire? Why on a mountain? Why was Moses so careful to recall these two aspects of Sinai so many times? Placed in the context of the event and appreciating the goal, let us rephrase the question: How is a voice emanating from a fiery mountain, indispensable for the proof God wished to offer man of His existence? How is fire different from all other elements, such as earth, water, air, wind, metals, ice, etc? How is a mountain different from all other topography, from lakes, oceans, valleys, hills, etc? I ask this, because Moses repeats these two aspects. He must be driving at some essential feature of the Sinaiic Revelation. But what?

Man has discovered life everywhere on this planet. In the most frigid zones, insects live in glacier ice, and fish, under frozen seas. In the highest altitudes, spiders with parachute-like webs keep them afloat on journeys to new continents. In hot, arid deserts, mammals hydrate themselves by licking condensation off of stones placed at the entrances to their burrows. In mud, frogs survive, and deep inside sand dunes, animals breathe air through tiny nostrils filtering sand grains from air. However, fire is the one element in which no biological life can survive. Why was it used by God to prove His existence? The answer is apparent.

God desired man to know that He exists, not just believe blindly. To this end, God orchestrated an event which would leave no doubt as to the Cause of the event – that this Cause is not a created being, but the Creator of the universe. How was this to be proved? Fire. This one element is mutually exclusive to all life. Yes, certain substances remain intact in even the most severe temperatures, but not life. No one at Sinai assumed anything physical could “speak to them from inside the fire.” Perhaps someone was dying inside the fire, and shrieked so loud, and that is what they heard? No, the verse says “a voice of words”, meaning, they heard intelligent speech, not someone’s dying shriek. A voice of intelligence emanating from “inside fire” proved beyond any doubt, that they were hearing words caused by God. They were being addressed by the Creator of fire, the Creator of all matter, the One Who is not controlled or affected by all creation or laws of creation. He is the One Who designed the universe. He is the only One who could go unaffected by a mountain ablaze. The Jews had solid proof for God’s existence, for the divine nature of the Torah, for God’s will that they follow His commands, and for Moses’ selection as God’s prophet.

Moses also recalls that the Jews saw no form. He says to them, *“And be exceedingly careful regarding your souls, for you did not see any form the day God spoke to you in Horeb from inside the fire.”* Moses wishes to stress that one’s own soul is at stake, if he imagines any form coexisted with the Revelation at Sinai. The Jews’ idolatrous tendencies would seek to explain away this unintelligible phenomena at Sinai. Man desires that everything fits into his familiar limited framework of understanding. But Moses alerts the Jews to this dangerous endeavor. He warns them that this event was not one as any other, that could be explained by natural law. *“You saw no form”, “And be exceedingly careful for you life”,* meaning, an error in connection with what God is, is the greatest error, and one’s life loses it’s purpose when he imagines God as physical in any way. *“You saw no form.”*

We now understand Moses’ numerous recollections of the event at which the Jews heard God’s voice from inside the fire. Fire dispelled any probability of an earthly existence being the cause of this event.

I believe the reason for a mountain was to enable such a large crowd of 2-3 million people to witness the event. Had this taken place on flat ground, those in the distance would see nothing. The mountain acted as an inverted stadium, where the event may be witnessed unobstructed from afar, and seen by many.

The existence of God is not to be left to faith. God designed man with intelligence so that we engage it, and certainly in the most vital of areas, our relationship with God, i.e., religious life.

Using reason, we today realize that such a massively-attended event must have occurred. We possess the same proof as those eyewitnesses over 3300 years ago. For if Revelation at Sinai did not take place, and Moses attempted to convince some nation that they and millions of others saw something which they had not, the story would never get off the ground. Moses would be viewed as a psychotic individual. That nation would not adopt Moses' lies in place of what they all knew was their true history. Imagine someone telling a few thousand New Yorkers that they just witnessed the Twin Towers suddenly reappearing. Not a single soul would pass this

on to his children as a true event, and 3000 years for now, such an event will not be incorporated by major religions. This is exactly what Moses would have confronted, had he lied about Sinai. But the fact that the world accepted the account throughout time and up to today, is a testament to the truth of God's revelation. It must have occurred. As is true regarding any historical account, Sinai too relies on mass witnesses as its validation. But had it simply been Moses' word alone, or the word of small groups, this does not provide proof, for motive to lie can be found in small groups.

Only with mass witnesses do we know for certain that an event transpired. This was the single time in history where God revealed Himself to man.

TOLDOS: GOD'S PROVIDENCE

PART I

Reading the Parsha each week, at times we gloss over “simple” information, assuming nothing more is intended below the surface. But this cannot be the case. Maimonides teaches, *“There is a good reason for every passage; the object of which we cannot see. We must always apply the words of our Sages: ‘It is not a vain thing for you’ (Deut. xxxii. 47), and if it seems vain, it seems your fault’.*”⁴⁰ With this in mind, let’s recap the story of Toldos and then isolate the questions.

Rivkah experienced a troubling pregnancy: the children were moving violently within her. Ibn Ezra says that Rivkah first asked other women if her pregnancy was the norm. When the women told her that her pregnancy was abnormal, she sought counsel from God via a prophet (either Abraham or Shem, Noah’s son). Rivkah was aware of God’s providence; initiated with Abraham and sustained unto Isaac and herself. The nation of the Jews was to be established through her. This pregnancy was unnatural and must be due to God’s will.

Rivkah then sought out a prophet and learned from him that she will give birth to twins (two nations) and that the
 40) Guide for the Perplexed, book III, chap. L

“greater son will be subservient to the younger.” This was the primary message. When she finally gave birth, Esav exited first, and the Torah describes him as red and covered with hair. Jacob then exited – his hand seizing Esav’s heel. The Torah then says that Esav became a hunter while Jacob was a dweller in tents. Isaac loved Esav, for he captured food for Isaac, while Rivkah loved Jacob. The Torah hints at an imbalance.

We then learn of the sale of the birthright. Jacob’s alacrity in requesting the birthright in exchange for the lentils appears premeditated. Later, Rivkah “somehow” hears Isaac preparing to give the blessings to Esav. Rivkah dresses Jacob in goat skins and in Esav’s garments to deceive the senses of the now blind Isaac into thinking Jacob is Esav. The ruse works. And not a split second after Jacob leaves Isaac’s presence, Esav enters requesting the blessings. This alarms Isaac greatly, as he realized through a successful blessing of Jacob that he must have been wrong about Esav. The blessings’ success indicated Divine Providence favoring Jacob, while all along Isaac favored Esav. Now our questions:

What was God’s intent that Rivkah experience an unnatural, tormenting pregnancy?

Why was Rivkah’s response to inquire about God’s provi-

dence from a prophet?

And why did she inquire of the prophets Abraham or Shem, but not of her own husband?

Of what significance is Esav's hairy nature?

Why are we told that Jacob seized Esav's heel at birth?

Of what significance is it that "Rivkah loved Jacob, while Isaac loved Esav"?

How was Jacob "instantly" prepared to purchase the birth-right from Esav when he asked for the lentils?

Why did Rivkah and Jacob agree they must deceive Isaac to obtain the blessings: why not ask Isaac openly?

Why was Isaac shocked when Esav came before him to receive the blessings?

It is clear, God intended Rivkah to obtain information vital to the establishment of the Jewish people. Her difficult pregnancy was intended to direct her to one who would inform her of God's intentions. With that new information obtained via the prophet – "the older would serve the younger" – Rivkah now cherished Jacob over Esav, as she learned through that prophecy that a matter of "nations" depends on the younger Jacob. (She was told that two nations would issue from her.) The prophecy taught her that she was to be instrumental in

securing the younger son's success, as a means of establishing the nation of Israel. She also deduced that Isaac was not given this prophetic information for a reason.

The patriarchs and matriarchs did not function in accord with simplistic favoritism as we do today. We must not err and project onto them. Thus, when the Torah teaches that "*Isaac loved Esav while Rivkah loved Jacob*", it must teach an important lesson. It appears this lesson is that Isaac was not as well informed as was Rivkah about the natures of their two sons. Thus, the Torah saw fit to teach us the imbalance of their divergent loves, so we might appreciate how God orchestrated His providence. As Isaac was misled by Esav's "*capturing his father with his mouth (Gen. 25:28)*", Isaac desired to give Esav certain blessings, and not bestow them upon Jacob. Isaac was deluded by Esav's ostensible good nature, as Esav disguised himself as upright with inquiries of proper conduct from Isaac (capturing him) only to earn Isaac's favor. In truth, Esav was evil. In contrast, the Torah teaches that Jacob was a "*dweller of tents (ibid 25:27)*": he was complete in his perfection and delved into the study of God.

Jacob's proper lifestyle did not present the charade offered by Esav's veneer. Esav presented himself in the manner he

knew his father would cherish. He “*captured his father with his mouth.*” Thus, the Torah thereby informs us of the need for God’s providence to work through the more-aware Rivkah. From the very outset of the lives of Esav and Jacob, Rivkah was taught that the younger Jacob was to rule his older brother and that Jacob was to receive the blessings. This was also substantiated through Jacob’s clutching of Esav’s heel. This strange phenomenon taught Rivkah that Jacob – right out of the womb – was one who could confront and usurp his twin. Rivkah relied on this knowledge later in her plan to deceive Isaac.

It was also vital that Rivkah receive the prophet’s communication ‘before’ giving birth. Now that she understood the younger was to be favored, she could interpret that act of Jacob clutching Esav’s heel as a Divine message. God was showing Rivkah the means He implanted into human nature to ensure success. God also created Esav with a hairy exterior, which would also play a vital role in Rivkah’s plan.

The Torah tells us how Esav arrives home exhausted. The Rabbis teach he had murdered, committed adultery and idolatry. A wise Rabbi said he did so, for on that day, Abraham had died: Esav – a man seeking an Earthly, hedonistic existence

alone – was frustrated that his grandfather Abraham would actually perish from this Earth. Esav’s immortality fantasy was abruptly shattered. He no longer clung to any role model displayed by Abraham: “for what is life, if it ends?” Esav felt. He therefore went astray from Abraham’s values and committed these grave acts. Esav, exhausted, requested the lentils Jacob had cooked. Jacob “instantly” countered with his offer to purchase the birthright from Esav, in exchange for the lentils. Thus, Jacob’s purchase was premeditated. He had already planned to obtain the birthright prior to this event! We might explain Jacob’s readiness to obtain the birthright was due to Rivkah’s informing him of her knowledge obtained via that earlier prophecy. Rivkah most probably explained to Jacob what she learned, that the younger Jacob was to rule over the older. This is supported by Jacob’s readiness to purchase the birthright.

Later, when Rivkah overhears that Isaac was about to give the birthright blessings to Esav, she urges Jacob to deceive his father and to disguise himself as Esav. The point here is that Rivkah is not first informing Jacob “that” he must obtain the birthright, but rather, “how” he can accomplish this. Thus, we find proof that Jacob already knew he was to obtain the birthright blessings. This is why he purchased them

from Esav at the outset, for Rivkah must have instructed him to do so. Otherwise, without a proper purchase, what right would he have to take them later? And without Rivkah informing Jacob that he should have the blessings, why would Jacob even think to purchase them? It must be as we suggest, that Rivkah learned through prophecy that Jacob – although the younger – must obtain the blessings. Therefore, Jacob was prepared at all times for the right moment to purchase them. Then, he must act to obtain them, even through deceit. For a lie is not absolutely prohibited by God. As we see God told Samuel⁴¹ to make believe he was offering a sacrifice, although he was truly en route to anoint David, in Saul's place. Samuel feared that Saul would learn of this and would kill Samuel for attempting to replace him with a new king. Thus, God instructed Samuel in a deception. Jacob too did not argue with Rivkah about the deceit here. He was only concerned that his father would not curse him, but he had no concern about the deceit itself as a sin to God. Jacob knew a lie is necessary at times. And Rivkah – as well as many others – lied for just reasons. Ibn Ezra teaches there is no harm in lying if it is for a proper motive.⁴²

41) Sam. I 16:2

42) Gen. 27:13

In summary, Rivkah required Divine instruction due to the imbalance between Esav and Jacob, and between her and her husband. She would have to act to bring about the nation of Israel. God orchestrated an abnormal pregnancy precisely to educate Rivkah on matters of this pregnancy: the issuing nations of Jacob and Esav and how they must be guided through her. Compelled to inquire from a prophet, Rivkah became equipped with the Divine knowledge, vital to ensure the blessings are bestowed upon the proper recipient.

There was a need for Rivkah to learn of the different natures of her two sons. She learned through prophecy that Jacob would be the superior. But she also learned through seeing his hand clutching Esav's heel, one more essential lesson. Through this act, Rivkah learned that Jacob possessed the natural tendency to usurp Esav. It was only through this knowledge gained by seeing his hand grabbing his brother's heel that Rivkah thereby learned that she must harness his nature to ensure the prophecy comes to be. Had she merely received knowledge that Jacob was to be superior, this knowledge alone does not compel her to act through Jacob. Rather, it was the act of Jacob grabbing his brother's heel whereby Rivkah understood she was seeing this for a reason. She deduced that this competitive display was necessary to indicate

that her two sons have various natures, through which she must play a role to ensure these natures are acted out. She must make Jacob topple Esav in “status”, when the time is right.

Rivkah teaches Jacob this prophecy when he is young, and Jacob is thereby ever-prepared from that point forward to purchase the birthright. And at the right moment, Rivkah and Jacob strategize a plan that succeeds, but again, only through God’s providence. For we see that no sooner that Jacob left, did Esav return.⁴³ This is to teach that God controlled the timing to the second, ensuring Rivkah and Jacob’s success. And finally, Isaac too attests to Jacob’s rightful receipt of the blessings, as he tells Esav, “*and he is surely blessed (ibid 27:33).*” For Isaac realized that since he was able to utter the blessings, then it must have been God’s will that Jacob had received them.

Isaac’s sudden shock⁴⁴ also explains why Rivkah did not inquire from her husband about her abnormal pregnancy, but only from Abraham or Shem. For she understood that Isaac would reject the idea of Esav’s unfit character. That is why Jacob too could not openly ask for the blessings, even though he rightfully purchased them. Until Isaac success-

43) (Gen. 27:30)

44) *ibid* 27:33

fully uttered the blessings, he would not accept Esav as unfit. Therefore Rivkah avoided approaching Isaac with her concerns regarding her pregnancy, and also when securing the blessings for Jacob. And Isaac again confirms to Esav that Jacob was correct in taking the blessings, as Isaac says to Esav, “your brother came with wisdom and took your blessings.” Why does Isaac say “with wisdom”? Perhaps to teach Esav that Jacob was correct.

The obvious questions and the clues to their answers are the true “codes of the Torah.” This is God’s method of directing us to unlock the Torah’s mysteries, imbuing us with an ever-growing appreciation for His wisdom, the development of our minds and souls, and understanding the perfection of our matriarchs and patriarchs.

Could it be that God prepared Rivkah to be Lavan’s sister, so she might learn of his cunning, as a preparation of this necessary deceit of Isaac? And could it be that Rivkah’s training of Jacob to use deceit helped to prepare Jacob to deal with Lavan for those 20 years when Lavan tried again and again to deceive Jacob? If so: it ends up that Lavan’s cunning came back to haunt him. For he displayed to Rivkah in their childhood home a deceitful nature. Thereby, Rivkah learned to be cunning herself and achieved a good outcome of the

blessings. Through Rivkah's deceit, Jacob learned how to deal with Lavan. Lavan's cunning came full circle and ended up ruining him.

PART II

Having read this, my friend Shaye asked a fine question: "I understand that 'after' Rivkah witnessed Isaac favoring Esav, that Rivkah had grounds to omit Isaac from her prophecy and her plans. But before she even had the prophecy, prior to giving birth...she avoided asking Isaac for an explanation of her abnormal pregnancy! She asked either Shem or Abraham. How can you explain this avoidance of Isaac 'before' Isaac ever expressed any favoritism towards Esav?"

I recognized the problem Shaye had raised, and immediately went back to the verses. Reading from the very beginning of the Parsha, I was bothered by the first two verses:

And these are the generations of Isaac son of Abraham; Abraham bore Isaac. And it was when Isaac was forty that he took Rivkah the daughter of Betuel the Arami from Padan Aram, the sister of Lavan the Arami, for a wife.

Think about this: the first verse already says “Isaac son of Abraham.” Why then does it repeat, “Abraham bore Isaac?” And in verse 2, if we are already told that Betuel, Lavan’s father was an “Arami”, (ostensibly a nationality), why are we told again that Lavan was also an “Arami?” If Lavan’s father was an Arami, then we know Lavan his son is also an Arami!

There are no redundancies in God’s Torah. I thought about the first question. I realized “Abraham bore Isaac” must indicate something new.

Abraham sought a wife for Isaac. We thereby learn that Isaac was incapable of selecting one for himself. We may suggest, “Abraham bore Isaac,” means that Abraham “raised” Isaac. In other words, Isaac – more than any other – was in need of paternal dedication and guidance. He was not as others, who approached marriage independently. His self-sacrifice on the altar had a profound affect on his nature. He was not even allowed to leave the land, as God told him to remain in Gerar and not descend to Egypt. Therefore, this first verse seeks to emphasize Isaac’s nature as greatly dependent upon Abraham.

The second verse teaches an apparent redundancy as well. We know Betuel is an Arami, so it is unnecessary to teach

that his son Lavan was also an Arami...if that means a nationality. Or Hachaim teaches that Arami in fact is not indicating a nationality, but a character trait. Switching two letters (in Hebrew) “Arami” becomes “Ramai”, meaning a swindler. A liar. In this verse, we are being taught that Isaac married a woman whose father and brother were liars. So even though we are taught that Betuel was a liar, we must also be taught that Lavan too chose this lifestyle, as it is not inherited, as seen from Rivkah’s upright stature. Now the questions.

Why must we learn of Isaac’s dependency on Abraham? Why must we learn that Rivkah’s father and brother were liars? I feel these two verses answer my friend Shaye’s question.

We are taught that Rivkah – one who observed a cunning personality in her father and brother – was able to detect Isaac’s shortcomings in terms of interpersonal issues. This prompted Rivkah to avoid approaching her husband Isaac with matters of her pregnancy. The Torah cleverly hints to the reason why Rivkah avoided Isaac: he was not fit, and she was cunning enough to know this from experiencing shrewd human nature in her home. We now understand why she went to Abraham or Shem – and not Isaac – when she was in need

of understanding the nature of her pregnancy, and how it might affect the establishment of B'nei Yisrael.

These two verses appear at the very start of our Parsha, as they explain the succeeding verses, and Rivkah's actions.

No question in Torah is without an answer. This time, we were fortunate enough to discover it. Thank you Shaye.

It is amazing how subtle redundancies can shed light: one of the true codes of Torah.

GOD'S PROVIDENCE

Esav born unnaturally covered with hair conveys Divine intent. The only other mention of Esav's exterior is the means through which Jacob deceived his father. This teaches that God's providence was in play at the very birth of these twins. God ensured a means existed through which the blessings would be successfully transmitted to Jacob.

First, God provides the impetus (a troubling pregnancy) to direct the righteous Rivkah towards obtaining greater knowledge. He gave Rivkah prophetic insight into the future of the Jewish nation, emanating from Jacob. It is clear that God wishes men and women to engage their intellects – we are not to sit back while God runs the world. The opposite is the

case: God desires the path and progress of mankind to be steered by mankind. We are to use all in our power to achieve the best for all others and ourselves. God says this in Genesis 1:28, *"Fill the Earth and conquer it."* But since man cannot know most variables or control even a few of them, God assists man when necessary. Therefore God imparted to Rivkah His plan and the necessary tools with which to attain success. These "tools" include Rivkah's own cunning personality adopted from her brother and father, Esav's physical hairy nature, Jacob's personality as capable of usurping Esav, and the knowledge of events such as Rivkah hearing Isaac's wish to bless Esav and Esav's wish to kill Jacob. And besides reacting to God's clues, Rivkah devised her own methods, such as dressing Jacob in Esav's clothing in her anticipation of Isaac's smelling the fragrance of the field, thereby assuming this was Esav before him.

Why were the blessings necessary at all? God can certainly achieve His plan without man! I believe Isaac's words of blessing were required as a means of silencing those descendants of Esav claiming shared rights to his legacy, along with Jacob. Talmud Sanhedrin 91a teaches how Ben Pasisa responded to Alexander when the Ishmaelites sought claim on Abraham's

legacy. Ben Pasisa responded, *“If a father sends away all his sons and gives them gifts while yet alive, do these sons have any future claim on the father’s legacy?”* (Referring to Abraham’s casting of all sons except Isaac, [Gen. 25]) This silenced the Ishmaelites. And I believe Isaac’s words too were necessary – not as causative of blessings, but as his exclusive selection of Jacob. Future generations of Esav can no longer justly claim an inheritance from Isaac, now that Isaac declared Jacob his sole inheritor.

THE TABLETS

The Three Weeks commences with the 17th of Tammuz and focuses us on the tragedies contributing to this day’s sorrowful nature. Talmud Taanis 28b records Moses’ smashing of the Tablets as one of these tragedies. As he descended from Sinai with those two sapphire Tablets bearing God’s laws, he encountered the Jews sinning with the Gold Calf. He responded by breaking the Tablets. A wise Rabbi explained that he did so, lest the Jews increase their idolatrous behav-

ior and deify these Divinely inspired objects even more than the Gold Calf. Moses broke the Tablets to eliminate this possibility. God agreed. We might think the service of the Gold Calf as more worthy of making the list of tragedies. But as a friend suggested, sin is not a “loss,” but a waste. A true “loss” is the removal of something of value or a failure to realize a gain. That loss was the Tablets. The removal of the positive is loss, not the engagement in the negative, the latter being “harm.” Similarly, we mourn the loss of the Temple and not the idolatry or enmity between Jews that precipitated those two losses, although the latter are evils for which we must repent.

To comprehend the loss of the Tablets we must understand 1) what they were and 2) why God gave them to us. The indispensable need for the Tablets is derived from God’s granting to Moses a second set of Tablets after he smashed the first set.

What I will suggest herein astonished me, but I feel Maimonides’ words point to this discovery:

The Guide for the Perplexed (Book I, Chap. LXVI)
"And the tables were the work of God" (Exod. xxxii. 16), that is to say, they were the product of nature, not of art: for all natural things are called "the work of the Lord," e.g., "These see the works of the Lord" (Ps. cvii. 24): and the description of the several things in nature, as plants, animals, winds, rain, etc., is followed by the exclamation, "O Lord, how manifold are thy works!" (Psalms, civ.24). Still more striking is the relation between God and His creatures, as expressed in the phrase, "The cedars of Lebanon, which he hath planted" (ib. 16): the cedars being the product of nature, and not of art, are described as having been planted by the Lord. Similarly we explain.

"And the writing was the writing of God" (Exod. xxxii. 16): the relation in which the writing stood to God has already been defined in the words "written with the finger of God" (ibid xxxi. 18), and the meaning of this phrase is the same as that of "the work of thy fingers" (Psalms viii. 4) this being said of the heavens: of the latter it has been stated distinctly that they were made by a word, "By the word of the

Lord were the heavens made” (ibid xxxiii. 6). Hence you learn that in the Bible, the creation of a thing is figuratively expressed by terms denoting “word” and “speech.” The same thing, which according to one passage has been made by the “word,” is represented in another passage as made by the “finger of God.” The phrase “written by the finger of God” is therefore identical with “written by the word of God,” and if the latter phrase had been used, it would have been equal to “written by the will and desire of God. Onkelos adopted in this place a strange explanation, and rendered the words literally, “written by the finger of the Lord.” He thought that “the finger” was a certain thing ascribed to God; so that “the finger of the Lord” is to be interpreted in the same way as “the mountain of God” (Exod. iii. 1), “the rod of God” (ib. iv. 20), that is, as being an instrument created by Him, which by His will engraved the writing on the tables. I cannot see why Onkelos preferred this explanation. It would have been more reasonable to say, “written by the word of the Lord,” in imitation of the verse “By the word of the Lord the heavens were made.” Or was the creation of the writing on the ta-

bles more difficult than the creation of the stars in the spheres? As the latter were made by the direct will of God, not by means of an instrument, the writing may also have been produced by His direct will, not by means of an instrument. You know what the Mishnah says, “Ten things were created on Friday in the twilight of the evening,” and “the writing” is one of the ten things. This shows how generally it was assumed by our forefathers that the writing of the tables was produced in the same manner as the rest of the creation, as we have shown in our Commentary on the Mishnah (Ethics 5:6).

UNDERSTANDING MAIMONIDES

We must pay attention to Maimonides’ words. He opens with “*And the tables were the work of God.*” His intent is to first discuss the Tablets – not their writing. He first explains how the Tablets were made via “nature,” meaning by God. They are not “works” or “art.” By definition, if natural objects are used in a new human construction or formation, like woodworking or paintings, we call this “carpentry” and “art” respectively. But if something is formed undisturbed by

human influence, as leaves are formed with veins and trees with bark, this we call “nature” and not art. Therefore, when addressing the Tablets, Maimonides writes, “they were the product of nature, not of art: for all natural things are called *“the work of the Lord.”* This means that the two Tablets formed naturally, but independently from the rest of the sapphire at Sinai that formed as a unified block. That is quite amazing. We will return to what this means. But they were not works of carpentry or art. Remain mindful of this distinction.

Maimonides then addresses the Tablets’ “writing:” *“And the writing was the writing of God.”* He states that although the Torah says the writing was *“written by the finger of the Lord,”* this writing was no less natural than the Tablets themselves, or God’s natural creation of the heavens. He disputes Onkelos’ suggestion that a tool was used to form these letters, and insists that those letters were created without a tool, just as God created the heavens, by His will alone and without any tool.

But focus your attention on Maimonides’ insistence that the writing was “natural” and not an act of carpentry or art. What does he mean by this? You must know that Maimonides

bases himself on the verse that references both the Tablets and the writing: *“And the tables were the work of God, and the writing was the writing of God (Exod. xxxii. 16).”* Maimonides teaches that this verse is not redundant. Not only were the Tablets a natural phenomenon, but so too was the writing. This is essential to our discussion. We must understand the distinction between writing that is natural and writing that is art.

God communicated Ten Commandments. Shortly afterwards they would be committed to the Sefer Torah Moses would write. Therefore, for what purpose did God create the Tablets with the same record of this communication? Is this not a redundancy?

Let’s briefly recount history. God orchestrated Revelation at Sinai. The nation heard great sounds. Moses ascends Mt. Sinai; he remains in commune with God forty days and nights and then he receives the Tablets from God. While still on Sinai, God informs Moses that the Jews sinned with the Gold Calf and that He will destroy the nation. Moses prays and God refrains from destroying the Jews. Before Moses descends the mountain we read these words:

And Moses turned and descended from the mountain, and the two Tablets of Testimony were in his hands; Tablets written from both sides⁴⁵, from this side and that were they written. And the tables were the work of God, and the writing was the writing of God, were they, explained on the Tablets (Exod. 32:15,16).

Why is Moses' descent interrupted with this detailed description of the Tablets? Why was this description of the Tablets not included earlier⁴⁶ where we read "And God gave to Moses – when He concluded to speak with him on Mount Sinai – two Tablets of testimony, tablets of stone, written with the finger of God?" This division of the Tablets' details into two Torah portions requires explanation, as does the term Tablets of Testimony: "testimony" to what exactly? And we wonder why "two" tablets are needed. Could not a larger tablet contain all the words; could not smaller letters accomplish the same message on a single tablet?

45) Ibn Ezra rejects the notion that the letters Mem Sofit and Samech (O-shaped letters) had miraculous center pieces floating. The Tablets' letters were not hollowed from one side completely through to the other, according to Ibn Ezra. They were simply written on two faces of the stones, as the stones were thick. Alternatively, I suggest the letters were internal facets in the translucent sapphire, seen on "both sides," like a crack can be seen from any side of a diamond. Furthermore, God does not perform impossibilities, so to have legible writing passing through a stone, with the exact wording seen on the opposite side, is not possible. God can do miracles, but not impossibilities. Similarly, God cannot create a circle that is a square.
46) Exod. 31:18

Maimonides also cited the Mishna in Avos: *“Ten things were created on [the first] Friday in the twilight of the evening,”* and *‘the writing’ is one of the ten things.*” Maimonides wishes to draw our attention to the necessity for God to have created the Tablets and their writing, at the end of the six days of Creation. What is his message?

In Exodus 34:1 God instructs Moses to hew a second set of Tablets and He says He will write on them the matters that “were” on the first tablets. Why doesn’t God say He will write on them the matters that “He wrote” on the first Tablets? He uses a less descriptive term. I also wonder if there was more to Moses’ breaking of the Tablets than already explained.

REVELATION

Revelation at Sinai was intended to remove all doubt, and for all time, that a Supreme Intelligence exists, created all, sustains all and communicates with man, and that there is only one Revealed Religion. God desired that this message would not end at Sinai’s closure. A friend suggested that the Tablets were intended to be an everlasting “testament” (Tablets of Testimony). This explains why upon God’s completion of His communication with Moses atop Sinai, we read, “And

God gave to Moses – when He *concluded* to speak with him on Mount Sinai – two Tablets of testimony, tablets of stone, written with the finger of God.” That is, once God *concluded* His Revelation, He desired an *everlasting* testimony of this Revelation. God did not desire the “conclusion” of the event to conclude the lesson. Thus, “testimony” appears in this verse and not later in the second description of the Tablets. In order that this testimony is everlasting, the words are embedded in a permanent object – stone. So “stone” is also in this verse.

But cannot anyone write words in stone? Of what proof, then, are these Tablets? The testimony God intended is to attest that He alone is the source of the universe. We read that these Tablets were “written with the finger of God.” Maimonides said this was a “natural” phenomenon. Here now is the amazing idea and how these Tablets “testified”...

ASTONISHING TABLETS

These miraculous Tablets contained something not found elsewhere in nature: naturally formed letters, sentences and commandments! Imagine a tree with branches that grew in the form of words, or leaves where the veins spelled-out

sentences. That is how astonishing these Tablets were. As God formed these unique Tablets over time at the end of Creation, He also formed the “writing” simultaneously, and naturally. These commands were not subsequently “carved” into the Tablets, but they literally grew with the stones as the stones formed through nature: *“And the writing was the writing of God.”* Maimonides said above this means a natural phenomenon. This explains why God tells Moses that He will write on the second Tablets the matters that “were” on the first set, and not matters that He “wrote” the first set. For God did not “write” on the first Tablets. Yes, the words appeared “written” as the verse states⁴⁷, but not through an act of one thing carving into another, resulting in words. Again, the verse does not say, “I wrote” on the first Tablets, but rather, “were” on the first Tablets. The letters in the first Tablets formed simultaneously with the Tablets themselves. This is an amazing phenomenon found nowhere else. Perhaps the natural grain of sapphire formed into letters and verses of Ten Commandments. Anyone viewing these Tablets would realize the writing was a natural phenomenon, a miracle, and not possibly a subsequent etching, as the Tablets were solid. Perhaps the writing was “inside” these translucent stones

47) Exod. 32:15

with no access to its inner portion and thereby testified to its miraculous nature. (Writing internally is impossible.) Perhaps for this reason, Maimonides includes in this chapter his critique of Onkelos' suggestion that the stone Tablets were carved through an instrument. Another truth is uncovered...

GOD OF NATURE AND THE TORAH

What consideration demanded that God create such a phenomenon? Although the words appearing on the Tablets were duplicated in the Torah scroll, it was not the words per se that demanded the Tablets' existence, but the *manner* of existence of these words. This natural formation of letters in stone is God's message that He created both; 1) the natural world, and 2) the Torah. This is needed, for many people view nature as devoid of God's creation and rule. Man becomes accustomed to phenomena by his very nature. The sun rises and sets; seasons change, and species beget their own kind. We take all for granted, thinking all occurs due to "nature" – not God. But with the existence of naturally formed Torah commandments in natural objects, we can no longer maintain a view of an unguided world. Nature is finally understood to be the expression of the Torah's Author. Torah and science

are complimentary and have the same source. How can one ignore a natural object that has Torah commands naturally imprinted, and not the work of art? This was the lesson of the Tablets.

Therefore, the Torah scroll's commands sufficed for the "content" of His words, but not for an everlasting "testament" which was revealed through natural stones containing intelligent words. We can no longer separate nature from God. His very words are embedded in these stones in a natural manner!

Why didn't God give the Tablets to Adam the First? Perhaps Adam had no need for them. God's original plan was that man use intelligence to discover God. The beauty and precision of natural law is sufficient for a person following a life of wisdom. However, at this era in mankind's development, these Tablets were intended to offer mankind a new leap in our wisdom of God. The ability for nature to produce such a phenomenon would offer us tremendous appreciation for the Creator of this nature. They were to be viewed and not placed in an Ark.

But as these Tablets were being delivered, the Jews sinned with the Gold Calf. The extraordinary lesson of the Tablets would not be realized with those Jews. These first Tablets

required destruction. However, a lesson was required: the nation must now have a reminder of what they lost. God instructed Moses to hew a new set; their tablet form would not come about naturally, but by human craft. God also “wrote” the matters on this second set; again, no longer a natural phenomenon of words that were part of their natural design. A gap now existed between the Jews and God. The intended, intimate relationship that could have been, was now lost. To emphasize this break from God, these Tablets must be stored out of sight; in an ark. Perhaps this explains why King Solomon hid the Ark and no other vessel. He reiterated this message of “distance” between God and the nation through digging caverns to eventually hide the Tablets and the Ark.

TEN THINGS WERE CREATED ON [THE FIRST] FRIDAY IN THE TWILIGHT OF THE EVENING (ETHICS 5:6).

As natural law needed to tolerate these unique Tablets, they had to be planned with the creation of the substance of sapphire. This could not be created later, for the very blueprint of how sapphire forms must contain natural laws that would generate stones with embedded communication. As this would be a “property” of sapphire’s substance, it must be set at the

time that God endowed sapphire with its formative properties – during Creation.

And Moses turned and descended from the mountain, and the two Tablets of Testimony were in his hands; Tablets written from both sides, from this side and that were they written. And the tables were the work of God, and the writing was the writing of God, were they, explained on the Tablets.

Why is Moses' descent interrupted with this detailed description of the Tablets? Why was this description of the Tablets not included earlier (31:18) where we read, "And God gave to Moses...two Tablets of testimony, tablets of stone, written with the finger of God?" We said above that the first account expresses the purpose of the Tablets – testimony. Thus, we learn that the testament is in durable stone, and that the testament is a unique phenomenon. But when Moses is about to descend to the sinful Jews, we are told of the Tablet's nature that conflicts with their idolatry: the Tablets were "God's work," intended precisely to fend-off idolatry. This aspect is relevant in connection with the idolatrous Jews and therefore not mentioned until its relevance surfaces – at Moses' descent towards the Jews

now performing idolatry.

We now appreciate the loss of the Tablets: our prospect of attaining greater knowledge of God was lost. This is the ultimate tragedy. What an amazing sight they must have been! Perhaps in the future this will be the means by which God will make His name fill the Earth. For we do not know if the Tablets were the only natural elements in which God embedded natural communication: perhaps others will be revealed. And as this was God's will at Sinai, perhaps in the messianic era He will unveil this again to a more fitting generation.

INTIMATION

KOSHER

Do you know why God commanded us in kosher laws? More than most laws, kosher has become iconic of Jewish observance. And this is not without cause. Many times in His Torah⁴⁸, God commands us to abstain from eating and touching certain creatures. Like all other commands, the benefit in following any law lies in understanding how it perfects us. And as always, God provides clues. The following are God's words as He concludes the section on permitted and prohibited species:

Do not defile your souls with any loathsome thing that creeps, and do not become contaminated with them and remain contaminated through them. For I am God your God and you shall be sanctified and remain sanctified, for I am sanctified and do not contaminate your souls with any creeping thing that crawls on the Earth. For I am God who took you out of the land of Egypt in order to be your God, and be sanctified for I am sanctified (Lev. 11:23-25).

48) Exod. 22:30, Lev. chap 11, Deut. 14:3

In our first source above, God's objective for us in our abstention from these creatures is to become like Him, "sanctified." The avoidance of disgusting behavior is a path towards sanctity. But how does this sanctification work? What is "sanctity?" How does eating prohibited animals harm us? More precisely, how does eating physical objects harm our metaphysical souls? (How is one related to the other?) Rashi says⁴⁹ abstaining from loathsome creatures alone sufficed for God to take us out of Egypt. What is Rashi's point? Why are we also told many times (Lev. chap 11) to additionally "abhor" (shekktetz) those creatures prohibited from our diet? Why isn't abstention from eating sufficient?

The Torah goes very far in distancing us from many species. We can eat all fruits and vegetables; there is no restriction as is the case regarding animals. Why? And what is it specifically about "creeping" things that it is a predominant theme among creatures we are prohibited to eat? Finally, what is it about the act of eating per se that is harmful? Other peoples do not follow kosher laws, yet, they have existed as long as we have. Eating non-kosher apparently does not wipe out civilizations.

49) Lev. 11:45

DECIPHERING GOD'S CLUES

In Leviticus chapter 11, God offers us signs that indicate permitted and prohibited animals: fully-split hooves, chewing cud, fins, scales, knees (locusts), multiple legs, belly-crawlers, paws, and things that creep upon the ground. Even the Rabbis say⁵⁰ that although in the Torah, birds are not signaled by a sign but by species, there is yet a sign relating to their legs. Interesting...most signs indicating a species' kosher or non-kosher status are based on its means of locomotion...an idea worth pondering. Now, let's start making steps to answer our questions...

LOCOMOTION & KOSHER

What is significant about locomotion? Unlike inanimate vegetation, animate life – beings with locomotion – engenders human identification. We don't identify with inanimate objects, like plants, rocks, mountains, or oceans. But animals move. This element of animate life awakens in man our identification with that creature. We are drawn to animals and visit zoos. We obtain pets and mourn at their deaths. We develop systems of animal rights, in which, man draws distinc-

50) Tal. Chullin 59a. See the mishna.

tions: killing insects or even reptiles and birds is not met with the same crime as killing dogs or cats. This is because man places greater value on those species with which he identifies greater.

Identification exists with moving creatures, unlike inanimate objects. Signs of prohibited species inhere in their means of locomotion, the feature wherein man identifies.

KOSHER IS A BARRIER

God wishes man to not identify with the prohibited species. By eating snakes, rats, spiders, etc. man breaks the natural barrier of disgust, and numbs his sense of what is to be loathsome. However, God wishes man to preserve this disgust. This is why He created man with this emotion. By preserving our emotion of disgust, our behavior in all areas benefits by these retaining walls. In contrast, people who eat whatever they wish and engage in unbridled lusts, and worse, eat disgusting species, forfeit their purpose as an intelligent being. They are no longer “sanctified.” Sanctified refers to man operating on the highest level humanly possible. This level is when he is most engaged in intellectual pursuits, studying the universe and Torah, as God designed humans to

do. Caving to desires without limit, and breaking the barriers of naturally-reviled things, man loses a critical boundary. (As vegetation offers man no dangers of identification, no restrictions apply. All fruits and vegetation are permitted as they were since Adam the First.)

We now understand that God wishes man to retain certain barriers. The emotion of disgust is invoked by certain types of creatures. A wise Rabbi once suggested that things that creep on the ground remind us of death. Perhaps it is that close proximity to the underground that we find abhorrent in these species. This can also explain why God created man upright, unlike most other creatures...distancing us further from the Earth. *"Also the world [God] planted in their hearts so man should not discover the matter that God has done from beginning to end (Koheles 3:11)."* This verse refers to God's design of man's immortality fantasy. (Ibn Ezra, *ibid*) God does not wish us to be preoccupied with death. Anything that reminds us of the grave is disturbing. These species disgust us due to their association with death. This disgust is reinforced through the prohibition of contact with them.

Eating is one of our two primary drives. Sex is the other. The Rabbis and leading psychologists are in agreement on

this. God restricts the Jew's involvement in satisfying these core instincts so we may become accustomed to controlling our instincts. The goal is to enable our intellects to rule our instincts. A person who has no limits on his appetitive and sexual activity will find great difficulty in advancing, or even engaging his intellect. His pursuit to know God will never be realized. For he will incite cravings that only grow as he feeds them: *"Rabbi Yochanan said, 'There is a small limb in man: starve it and it becomes satiated, feed it and it becomes hungry' (Tal. Succah 52b)."* Rabbi Yochanan teaches that the more we satisfy an instinct, the greater the urge, and thus, less energy is available for fulfilling God's Torah.

Abstaining from lusts and from eating any creature, suffices to control our emotions on one level. By not eating "disgusting" creatures, we break identification with that species, and we additionally maintain the emotion of disgust, which can then be applied to other forbidden areas. God desires we maintain a minimal level of abhorrence in the area of the appetitive drive. Retaining this disgust for certain species, we don't only control one emotion, but all of our emotions benefit. We will find avoiding detestable behaviors easier since we strengthened our overall emotion of disgust.

By our very nature, we cannot be overindulgent in one area,

without our entire emotional makeup sensing this relaxation. This explains why the Jews worshipping the Gold Calf also arose to engage other instincts.⁵¹ The satisfaction of one emotion – idolatry – causes all other emotions to seek satisfaction. In contrast, abstaining from contact with certain species helps to control all other emotions.

Leviticus 11 categorizes mammals, then fish, then birds. It is interesting that pawed animals are not initially identified in the first group, that of mammals⁵². Also interesting is that mammals alone are the one group in which we do not find the word “disgusting” (shekktetz). Instead, they are called “tammay” or impure. Perhaps this is because God wishes to teach another consideration within kosher laws. One aspect is what we answered, to sustain a barricade of disgust. Another benefit – in abstaining from pawed creatures – is that it engenders mercy. Pawed animals offer man more identification than other creatures. They are more like man, who differs from animals in our speech and creative abilities. Paws closely resemble human hands, our tools of creativity. We even ascribe intelligence to species that express greater tactile dexterity, like monkeys. The more an animal resembles

51) Exod. 32:6

52) Lev. 11:1-8

man, the greater the identification. It's a natural human response. The prohibition to abstain from pawed animals may serve the opposite benefit: to retain a level of mercy towards God's creatures. Therefore, God also prohibits animals that more closely resemble man. It is then not surprising that our pets are pawed. Our relationship to animals is then twofold: 1) abstention from disgusting creatures to maintain the necessary emotion of abhorrence, 2) to engender mercy toward beings that are not disgusting. Good and bad emotions are thereby kept in check.

God created man to naturally sense a feeling of abhorrence. We could have been designed to find all creatures equally appealing, but God deemed this harmful. He instilled in human nature many emotions, including disgust for many creatures. This disgust may be towards their outer appearance like rats and many insects. We also are designed to revile things that crawl, like snakes and spiders. God tells us this in the quote above. He created us with disgust, and additionally commanded the Jew to reinforce this disgust through abstaining from eating or touching many creatures. Disgust is the natural wall between man and his instincts. By abstaining from instinctual gratification according to Torah parameters, God intends that man raise himself to the life where his intellect

is not compromised, but rather, free to engage in studying the Creator. This is how man is sanctified, and resembles his Creator. This is Rashi's point, that the path to living an intelligent life is paved by controlling our instincts. Abstaining from certain species accomplishes this goal, and alone, this warranted God's Egyptian Exodus.

SUMMARY

At first, we wonder at the various species, why are they all needed? What is kosher all about? Is it a health law?

We then appreciate that God permitted us to enjoy flesh in all corners of the Earth, since man is mobile. We travel. God provided food in all regions: land and sea, valleys and mountains. By analyzing the signs that indicate kosher and non-kosher species, we realize they address our inner emotional makeup, rarely examined, and many times rejected. But God teaches us through kosher laws that we must have one eye on our psychological health and strive toward the perfection of our instincts.

We also must recognize the species as God's will and show them mercy, as in sending the mother before taking the young, thereby sparing her pain, and perhaps also via ab-

staining from pawed species. This reinforces the mercy we are to show people. With our emotions in check, abstaining from eating certain species and even going so far to abhor them, we control our instincts and become in some small way like our perfectly intelligent Creator who is bereft of any human quality and emotion. We too can partake of wisdom, the pursuit that God designed that offers us the greatest satisfaction.

As Jews, our mission differs from all other peoples. As teachers of God's Torah, we must condition our instincts through restraint, allowing our intellects to be untarnished from urges that cloud our thought. In this pristine manner, we can study clearly and accurately teach God's single system for mankind in a manner that impresses all who observe us. God's words will then be fulfilled as the nations remark:

What a wise and understanding people is this great nation. For what great nation possesses righteous statutes and laws as this entire Torah(Deut. 4:6,8).

WISDOM OF THE VERSES

I have been concentrating on articles that focus on how to learn the Torah's verses. I have been compelled to do so, as more and more often I hear others repeating what they've learned, and it is disappointing. Disappointing because they have not been exposed to God's brilliant method of revealing ideas through the very text. I hear notions that do not fit the text, and notions that are not true. Teachers themselves are not aware of how God hides and reveals Torah insights. This forfeits the transmission and the delight possibly imparted. The only way to correct this problem is through many examples. Once a Torah student is exposed to the precise and insightful methods God uses in constructing the verses, that student will become imbued with an appreciation for Torah over all else he or she encounters. This is what we call "Love of God." We cannot know "Him" so as to love Him, but we can know some of His wisdom, on a human level. We love God through seeing His wisdom. And although it is minute wisdom, to us, it can be remarkable. For this reason, we must not be satisfied with mediocre explanations and mere possibilities; we must insist on understanding why each word is found in each verse. I intend to show such an example here.

God says the following:

"Shall I keep hidden from Abraham what I plan to do? And Abraham will surely become a great, mighty nation, and all nations of the land will be blessed due to him. For he is beloved on account that he will command his children and his household after him, and they will guard the path of God, performing charity and justice, so that God will bring upon Abraham what He has spoken." And God said [to Abraham], "The cry of Sodom and Amora is great and their sin is greatly heavy. I will descend and see if in accordance with their cry that comes to Me I will annihilate them; and if not, I know (Gen. 18:17-21)."

We understand from the following verse (ibid 18:25) that Abraham had a clear understanding of God: God would never kill the righteous on account of the sins of others:

Far be it to do such a thing, to kill the righteous with the wicked, and the righteous and the wicked would be equal, far be it...the judge of the Earth would not do justice?!

Abraham was correct in this exclamation. This was Abraham's knowledge of God all along: the wicked deserve punishment, and the righteous do not. This is justice. However, God said earlier, "*Shall I keep hidden from Abraham what I plan to do?*"

This is the first lesson: there are areas of knowledge which man cannot penetrate. And this is rightfully so, for man cannot possess all knowledge; only God does. Therefore, God expresses a sentiment to the Torah reader that if He does not disclose His wisdom on this topic of "justice," Abraham – and mankind – will remain in the dark; it will be "hidden" from Abraham.

God also expressed His reasoning for inviting Abraham to investigate this matter:

Abraham will surely become a great, mighty nation, and all nations of the land will be blessed due to him. For he is beloved on account that he will command his children and his household after him, and they will guard the path of God performing charity and justice...

That is, God wishes the world to increase in their knowledge of Him. And since Abraham teaches his household of God's ways (and greatly benefits other nations by rebuking their idolatry, as Sforzo states), God imparted to Abraham greater knowledge of morality. Examining the world or theorizing moralistic philosophy cannot uncover the secret we are about to discuss. That is the meaning behind the phrase "Shall I keep hidden." Therefore, God revealed a new area of knowledge so Abraham should learn, and teach others.

The glaring question is this: If God decides not to hide this secret, where in this account do we see God informing Abraham of it? Somehow, Abraham knew to ask God whether He would spare the wicked, based on numbers of righteous people. This mercy was not what Abraham knew before... this was the new piece of information God disclosed and did not "hide." He assured Abraham that if at least 10 righteous people were in Sodom, He would spare all of them, even the wicked.

So we now know the secret: previously, Abraham assumed the wicked must die – no exceptions. But now Abraham understood that God's mercy can allow wicked people to remain, provided there exists the influence of at least 10 righ-

teous people can turn them back towards repentance and God. We understand this. But again: from where did Abraham derive this new concept of God mercifully sparing the wicked people on account of the righteous? God does not say this in the entire account! However, the hints must be in what He told Abraham. Read it again:

And God said [to Abraham], "The cry of Sodom and Amora is great and their sin is greatly heavy. I will descend and see if in accordance with their cry that comes to Me, I will annihilate them; and if not, I know."

This is from where Abraham derived the new concept that God will spare the wicked.

Do you see the hint?

Do you see any questions?

I have one: If their sin is "greatly heavy," why should they not receive punishment? This is compounded by God's very words, "if in accordance with their cry that comes to Me, I will annihilate them." God is saying that in accordance with their corruption, they deserve annihilation. Yet, God says there exists the possibility of Him "not" annihilating them!

Now, if their current state of sin requires God's punishment, for what reason would God abstain? There is only one possibility where the merit to save them exists: the righteous inhabitants.

Abraham understood to God's words: "in accordance with their state, they deserve annihilation." But God also said a possibility exists that they will be spared. In God's very words was the clue. Abraham now realized a new concept: God does not work with strict justice, but He also performs charity, "tzedaka." Abraham knew about tzedaka, but he did not know all of its applications. It was necessary that God teach him this specific case. We might even add that God's concluding words "I know" are meant to indicate to Abraham that this knowledge is what "God" knows, and not man. It is concealed until God imparts it through this prophecy. God intended to teach that this idea is of a concealed nature. He taught this to us through the future-given Torah narrative "Shall I keep hidden", and He taught this to Abraham through the words "I know".

Thus, God taught Abraham a new idea in justice that man could not arrive at alone: the wicked could be spared. And He also taught him that there are ideas, which are concealed if

God does not offer man clues.

We learn that God presented just enough clues in His words to allow Abraham to think into the matter. Once he realized this new concept, the next question was how many righteous people are required to save the wicked. But why did God inform Abraham in such a subtle manner?

God does so as this increases a person's intelligence, his reasoning power. Just as a Talmudic scholar is not born with his skills, but gains them over decades of practice...Abraham too grew in his capacity to reason for himself through this experience. With thought, Abraham questioned his current beliefs and principles. Abraham moved beyond his previous boundaries, and excelled to greater wisdom.

Many times we prevent ourselves from alternative choices, simply because we are incapable of reasoning out all possibilities, or due to false assumptions. For example, a student may accept all ideas in books, simply due to his mind being crippled by the false notion that "all books must be true." People are quite impressed by authors and feel each author knows about what he or she writes. But once the student sees an error in one book, this broadens his horizons and he will never again blindly accept any notion, just because it's printed.

A wise Rabbi once cited Rav Moshe Feinstein's critique of the Ramban. Ramban condemned Abraham for leaving Canaan and descending to Egypt due to the famine. Rav Moshe zt"l said that Ramban's comment should be torn out of the Chumash. The lesson: even Ramban can be wrong. But we incorrectly tend to shy away from such statements. We fear reputations. But you must know that the greatest of our teachers – Maimonides – openly invited anyone at all to correct his errors. Maimonides did not feel infallible; he admitted that those below him in wisdom could correct him. No one is always correct.

People sometimes say, "Who am I to argue with Ramban?" This means they credit Ramban, or any Rabbi, as possessing tools to attain accurate understanding. But God did not give Ramban alone the Tzelem Elokim – intelligence. God gave it to every human. He did so in order that we engage it, and not make such statements. If we continually refrain from challenging our teachers, we reject God's will that we employ this great gift of intelligence. Of course we are respectful of all Torah scholars and teachers. But as one Talmudic Rabbi said, he cherished questions on his words more than words of support.

Furthermore, any person who assesses the Rabbis as bril-

liant thereby admits he can accurately determine truth, i.e., that they are brilliant. And if he can determine truth, he then contradicts himself when saying he cannot argue with them. For if one can determine truth, and does so in a specific case, he must disagree with anyone who opposes that truth. Regardless of who it is. It is a false humility, or a corrupt mind that will at first passionately support his view, and then back down when he learns a Torah scholar holds the opposite. If he was firm on his understanding at first, he must be honest and say he disagrees, regardless of whom he opposes. Again, the Torah commentaries disagree with each other, and do not blindly accept even the words of those far greater than them. A Talmudic Rabbi once said, *“Had Joshua bin-Nun said it, I would not hear it (Tal. Chullin, 124a).”*

Although I carried an awe of the Rabbis from youth, once I heard Rav Moshe’s critique of Ramban’s words, I realized that no one is infallible. This was one of the greatest lessons that had the most dramatic affects on my studies. Furthermore, there is no Torah obligation to accept any idea outside of halacha. In matters of philosophy, there is no “psak” – ruling. Many times people say, “Maimonides is only a minority view, I need not follow him”. Their error is in applying

halachik principle of “majority rule” to hashkafa – philosophy. The Torah teaches, *“According to ‘law’ that they will teach you and the judgment that they will tell you, you should behave. You should not deviate from that which they tell you to the right or left (Deut. 17:11).”* This means the Rabbis have authority on "laws" and nothing more. Not philosophy.

Additionally, a wise Rabbi once taught that no one – not even great Rabbis – can tell you what you think. Meaning, it is impossible that anyone be compelled to believe something, which they do not. Yes, in halacha I can be compelled to "act." But philosophy is concerns beliefs alone. Thus, there cannot be a ruling on philosophy. This is something we can only come to on our own. Either we accept a belief, or we don't. And if I do not believe something, no one can possibly force that belief.

The refusal to accept popular opinions was Abraham's greatest trait. It was through questioning what he was taught, that he discovered the error of his father and that entire idolatrous generation. This trait led him to discover God after 40 years of independent reflection and analysis. There were yet areas that Abraham could not penetrate, but God assisted him. God also assists us in the form of His Torah. And if we

continue to question the Torah, as is God's will, we will then unlock numerous other "hidden" treasures.

The verses are truly astonishing.

THE COMMANDS

THE PURPOSE OF ALL MITZVAHS

Ibn Ezra (Exod. 31:18)

Brainless people wonder what Moses was doing on Mount Sinai 40 days and 40 nights! And they don't know if he stood there with God this amount of time. [And even if you] greatly multiply this duration [that Moses stood on Sinai] he could not know [even] one part in a thousand of God's works and His ways and the fundamentals of all mitzvahs that God commanded Moses! [Brainless people wonder this] for they think that the "performance" [of mitzvah] is the essence. But this is not true; rather [the essence of mitzvah] is the "heart" [human intent]. [So be aware] that the actions, thoughts and speech [commanded by mitzvah] are merely to make one fluent [in following the laws]. And accordingly, it is written, "It is in your mouth and in your heart to perform it", and so have our early [Sages] said, "God desires one's heart."

And the root of all mitzvahs culminates in loving God with all one's soul and clinging to Him. But this cannot be complete if one does not recognize

God's works in the higher creations and in the lower ones, and in knowing His ways. And accordingly the prophet said, "Only in this shall the praiser praise himself: become wise and know Me." Then it will be clarified to him, that God performs kindness, justice and charity in the land. But one cannot know God if he does not know his own inclination, his soul and his body. For anyone who does not know the nature of his soul, what wisdom does he have?

And behold, Moses who prophesied 40 years in the desert and grasped great principles that God revealed to him on Mount Sinai, and yet, he said before his death, "You have only begun to show your servant Your greatness." And behold now [even at that time] He [only] began to show him the greatness of God.

Ibn Ezra describes a phenomenon equally applicable to today's Jew. Jews get caught up in the "performance" of mitzvahs, and not with understanding their profound lessons and the human perfection God truly intends. Yes, God gives us commands, and we must act...but we act only in order that

we become fluent in performance as Ibn Ezra says above. Our acts are targeting a greater good. God does not merely desire the physical activities of waving a Lulav, wearing Tefillin, reciting Kiddush or giving charity. “God desires one’s heart.” That is, God wants his human creations to perform mitzvahs because they understand the principles behind the mitzvahs, and value them as precious truths. Performance is merely the barometer of one’s convictions. But it is the conviction in the mitzvah’s idea that is the goal of the mitzvahs.

The gift of intelligence is precisely in order to arrive at greater truths about God and His ways. Had action alone been all God desired, the intellect’s amazing capabilities would be of no use. Furthermore, the tapping of the intellect’s potential cannot be accomplished through simple action. Mitzvah requires great thought, and that’s why Moses stood on Sinai with God for over a month, day and night.

Brainless people wonder what took so long for Moses to descend Mount Sinai. “All he had to do was learn how to perform the mitzvahs, and then come back down the mountain,” they think. They doubt Moses even needed 40 days! But as Ibn Ezra teaches, Moses could spend numerous years in communion with God and not even scratch the surface of God’s knowledge.

IBN EZRA'S FORMULATION

He commences with a critique: people think action – and nothing more – is the goal of the mitzvahs. What causes a person to gravitate to the mitzvah's performance, and not go further? What prevents one from unraveling the clues in the mitzvah's design, and arrive at the fundamentals? Ibn Ezra immediately alerts us that “There's so many fundamentals and profound ideas, that even after 40 years, Moses barely scratched the surface.” This was Moses' own admission. This dose of reality will hopefully impact people and drive them to seek the lessons of the mitzvahs.

The cause of preoccupation with performance is the sensual nature of a human being, which has a head start over our intellects. *“For the inclination of man's heart is evil from youth (Gen. 8:21).”* Our instincts are with us from birth, but our intellects develop slowly, over many years. Most people find great difficulty controlling – and certainly abandoning – a sensual lifestyle. And when confronted with Torah obligation, people attach themselves to the components that are sensual, meaning the physical act. Since they have followed a lifestyle rooted in the senses alone, and not intellect, they view Torah and mitzvahs from their senses, not their intel-

lects. They don't live in their intellects, but in their instincts, so all is filtered through their instincts. Mitzvahs, then, are treated identically: whatever does not touch their instincts and senses, is ignored. Therefore, all they sense is the act of mitzvah, and they ignore the mitzvah's designs and halachas that point to immense insight.

This is the flaw Ibn Ezra wishes to correct with this commentary. He appropriately refers to such people as "brainless" (literally "empty-brained") as an indication that this core faculty of intelligence is not engaged, when it truly should be.

He then addresses the obvious question: If performance is not the goal, why are mitzvahs relegated to thought, speech and action, which are performances? He answers that this is to accustom us, for repeated behavior conditions a person in a desired path. He validates this with this verse, "*It is in your mouth and in your heart to perform it (Deut. 30:14)*", but then qualifies the true goal with the Rabbis' words, "*God desires one's heart (Tal. San. 106b)*" based on God's words to Samuel, "*Man sees with the eyes, but God sees the heart (I Samuel 16:7)*." This verse also validates our idea that man is primarily sensual, "seeing with his eyes" and not looking into another person's heart and motives, like God does.

Next, Ibn Ezra explains why performance cannot be the end goal...

LOVING GOD

This – Ibn Ezra teaches – is the goal of the mitzvahs. But what is the meaning of “loving God”? How is this mitzvah performed? How does one “love” God, when we don’t know what He truly is?

Maimonides explains that one’s love of God is in direct proportion to his or her knowledge of God (Hilchos Teshuva 10:10). Thus, love of God equates to “appreciating God’s wisdom.” The more one studies God’s creations and Torah, the greater is his or her love of God. And although we cannot love God Himself, we are drawn to the Source of the wisdom and goodness we witness in creation and Torah. This is what we call love of God.

Ibn Ezra quotes Jeremiah 9:22,23, teaching that man’s true praise is not based on his morality, strength, or wealth. Rather, a person is praiseworthy only if he becomes wise and knows God. Read that again...he must “become wise” and

know God. This means that one must study. Why? Because the mere performance of mitzvah is not the goal. One must study and learn if he or she is to uncover the brilliance of true Torah values. It is not the performance alone that God desires, but man's heart, his "understanding" and "intent." One can go through the motions, but this does not reflect on one's inner recognition of the mitzvahs' true messages. A man or woman has not perfected themselves by performance alone. Perfection is achieved only when one recognizes a truth, and values it enough to act on it. The act, then, is a barometer of one's conviction. But it is the intellectual conviction that God wants... "God wants the heart".

And this is so sensible, since man's true essence is his intelligence; the faculty that distinguishes him over all other creations. It is then his intelligence that will mark his true worth. Animals can perform actions. But it is man alone who can recognize his Creator, and uncover His brilliance. Thus, actions are not our mark of distinction: it is our capacity to become wise through understanding the perfection and design of the universe and the mitzvahs, thereby attesting to those truths.

SYSTEM OF KNOWING GOD

Ibn Ezra then teaches that man must first recognize God as the creator of what is above. This gives man the perspective that the universe and literally all that is, exists only due to a Creator. Once man recognizes God as “creator”, meaning the exclusive “cause” of everything, he must also know how God “governs” His creations. This is what is meant by knowing the “lower ones,” meaning man. We must know that “*God performs kindness, justice and charity in the land.*” And these are valued only if we understand the design of man, meaning, his instincts, his soul and his body, as Ibn Ezra states. By understanding man’s psychological, intellectual and bodily designs, only then do we learn what are man’s needs, and how God supplies these needs through acts that we call kind, just and charitable. Our appreciation for God’s provision of food, clothing, and shelter grants us one level of appreciation for God. But as we study man’s internal world, we learn of the multifaceted psyche, and how Torah laws guide us to a measured lifestyle that keep all drives in check, and enable us to grow intellectually and morally through the myriad of other laws and their designs. And with our study of the universe and of the Torah’s halachik and philosophical systems, our

minds find the greatest pleasure unraveling marvels and deep insights that fill us with the greatest experiences. Through study, we recognize God as creator and governor. And as we grow in our learning of God's creations and government of man, our appreciation (love) for God grows proportionately.

A KIND, JUST AND CHARITABLE GOD

It is vital at this point to understand why God is all three: kind, just and charitable. On Jeremiah 9:23, Radak defines these three traits. Kindness is excessive goodness performed for another being, and has two expressions: 1) goodness performed for one who has no claim on you; 2) and goodness that is over and above what is due to another who has a claim on you. Charity is the act of giving another whatever it needs, as in food for the hungry and clothes for the naked. And justice is meting out reward or punishment depending on the person's merits and sins.

Justice is applicable to humans alone. The former two also apply in some measure to animals. None apply to inanimate beings.

Why are all these qualities necessary? It is because the needs of living beings vary. And as God is perfectly good,

His response to varying needs varies. At times, a being only requires nourishment; God's providence for this is called righteousness. But at times, people require more than what meets their basic needs, due to emotional issues for example. Therefore, an added attentive measure called kindness is required to set such a soul on a path of happiness and equilibrium. For example, a depressed person will need additional attention and patience as compared to others who are functioning with normal optimism. And when one is evil, justice is required to correct that person or society, or to deter others.

It is only through understanding a spectrum of God's ways that we can accurately appreciate each mitzvah, through understanding its insights and ramifications. If one is devoid of knowledge of God, his charity misses the mark, for he does not view charity as a means to set a person on a good path, in order to love God. He simply views it economically, not in connection with God. And this is not the mitzvah of charity. And if a person lives in accord with strict justice alone, and does not bend with the needs of the needy, he is not acting as God acts. For he allows his emotional temperament to dictate his acts, when he really should determine his acts based on

God's values. And at times, this means we forgo what makes us comfortable, in order that another human being might find happiness.

As you can see, Ibn Ezra is correct...we can discuss God's mitzvahs for 40 days or even 40 years and not scratch the surface! This explains why the Talmud and Shulchan Aruch are so lengthy.

THE FUNDAMENTAL

Ibn Ezra takes us through a sequence of considerations in order to fully explain the goal of mitzvahs; that being the love of God. He informs us that aside from understanding a given mitzvah, we must possess the additional knowledge of God as both the creator and governor. Meaning, these two truths form the crucial backdrop to understand all mitzvahs. For a mitzvah cannot exist in a vacuum. If one waves the Lulav in all directions, without knowing God alone created produce, he misses the entire point of Lulav, which is our thanks for produce to the God who governs the heavens and Earth, and all of man's Earthly activities. If one wears Tefillin but does not know that we thereby attest to God's exclusive reign over Egypt and all natural laws, we again miss the purpose of this

mitzvah, commanded right after the 10 Plagues. And if one prays to God but thinks “God is physically inside us”, and He is not the metaphysical being He truly is, one is not praying to God, but to his fantasy. And fantasies cannot respond to your prayers.

These insights must renew in us all a fresh perspective on mitzvahs, that will grant us true appreciation for the laws, but mostly, a love for the Creator.

THE TABLETS, THE TORAH AND MOUNT SINAI

God instructed Moses to quarry a new set of stones for God’s engraving of the second set of Ten Commandments.⁵³ God “wrote”⁵⁴ the Ten Commandments on both sets, but God quarried only set #1: Moses was commanded to quarry set #2. Moses broke the first set of tablets in the sight of the people. A Rabbi explained this was done so the people would not worship the stone tablets as they did the Golden Calf. A new set of tablets was then required. But why do we need the

53) Deut. 10:1

54) Not necessarily through an act of engraving

Ten Commandments on stone tablets at all? If we need commands, we can receive them orally from God, or from Moses, so why are tablets needed? Also, why was there miraculous writing on the tablets? If Moses felt the people might err by deifying the first set, why was a second set created? I also wondered why a box was required for the second set, but not for the first?

I then started thinking more into the purpose of the tablets: Was this the only thing Moses descended with from Sinai? Was there a Torah scroll? What about the Oral Law? What did Moses receive, and when? I also questioned what exactly comprised the content of the Written Torah and the Oral Law. Events subsequent to Sinai, such as the Books of Numbers and Deuteronomy had not yet occurred, so it did not make sense to me that these were given at Sinai. What did Moses receive at Sinai?

The Five Books of Moses, Prophets, Writings, Mishna, Me-drash, and Talmud comprise authentic, Written and Oral Law. However, what was received, by whom, and when? In addition to content, there is knowledge to be derived from God's transmission. Certainly, the Ten Commandments must be

unique in some way, as God created separate stones revealing only these ten. What is their significance? The answers begin to reveal themselves by studying these areas in Exodus and Deuteronomy. Exodus 19, and 24 recount the arrival of the Jews at Sinai and the events which transpired:

And to Moses (God) said, "Ascend to God, you, Aaron, Nadav and Avihu, and the seventy from the elders of Israel, and prostrate from afar. And Moses alone, draw near to God, but the others, don't approach, and the people, do not ascend with him." And Moses came and told over to the people all the words of God, and all the statutes, and the entire people answered as one and they said, "All the matters that God has said we will do." And Moses wrote all the words of God... (Exod. 24:1-4)

And God said to Moses, "Ascend to Me to the mountain, and remain there, and I will give you the tablets of stone, and the Torah and the Mitzvah (commands) that I have written, that you should instruct them (ibid 24:12)."

“And Moses wrote all the words of God...” teaches that prior to the giving of the tablets of stone, Moses ascended Mount Sinai, learned ideas from God, descended, taught the people what he learned, and wrote “the words of God.” (This was the order of events prior to Moses’ second ascension to Mount Sinai to receive the Ten Commandments.) What were these “words?” Ibn Ezra says this comprised the section of our Torah from Exod. 20:19–23:33. This is the end of Parshas Yisro through most of Parshas Mishpatim. This was told to the Jews before the event of Sinai where God gave Moses the Ten Commandments. The Jews accepted these laws, and Moses wrote them down. This is referred to as the *“Book of the Treaty.”* Moses entered them into a treaty with God, that they accept God based on the section mentioned. Only afterwards was that famous historical giving of the Ten Commandments from the fiery Mount Sinai. But the Jews were first offered to hear the Torah’s commands.

Earlier in Exodus, 19:8, we learn of this same account, but with some more information. When Moses told the Jews the commandments verbally, prior to the reception of the tablets, the Jews said as one, *“all that God said we will do,”* and *“Moses returned the word of the people to God.”* Moses returned to God and told Him the Jews’ favorable response.

Moses knew that God is aware of all man's thoughts, deeds and speech. What need was there for Moses to "return the word?" Then God responds, *"Behold, I come to you in thick cloud so that the people shall hear when I speak with you, and also in you will they believe forever..."* What was Moses intent on reporting the Jews' acceptance of these commands, and what was God's response? Was Moses' intent to say, "There is no need for the event of Sinai, as the people already believe in You?" The Rabbis offer a few explanations why Revelation at Sinai was necessary. Ibn Ezra said there were some members of the nation who subscribed to Egypt's beliefs (inherited from the Hodus) that God does not speak with man. God therefore wished to uproot this fallacy through Revelation. Ibn Ezra, then, is of the opinion that Revelation was not performed for the Jews' acceptance of God, which they already had accepted, *"And the entire people answered as one, and they said, 'all the matters that God has said we will do'."*

According to Ibn Ezra, God teaches the purpose of the miracles at Sinai: "Yes, the people believe in Me, but there is yet something missing: a proof for ALL generations", as God said, *"...and also in you will they believe forever."* The Sinaic event of God giving the Ten Commands from a fiery mountain had one purpose; to stand as a proof for all generations. This is

something many of us are already familiar with: a massively attended event at which an Intelligence related knowledge to man, from amidst flames is an undeniable proof of the existence of a Metaphysical Being in control of all creation. Sinai serves as our eternal proof of God's existence. We now learn from a closer look that the Jews had already accepted God's commands prior to the giving of the Ten Commandments. That event was to serve as a proof of God's existence, but the Jews' agreement to those ideas came earlier.

WHAT GOD GAVE MOSES AT SINAI

The Torah tells us God communicated many commands without writing, and He also gave Moses the Ten Commandments. Ibn Ezra says the "Torah and the Mitzvah" referred to in Exod. 24:12 is as follows: *"The 'Torah' is the first and fifth⁵⁵ commands (of the Ten) and the 'Mitzvah' refers to the other eight."* This implies that all which God gave was the Ten Commandments on stone. Further proof is found openly: *"And it was at the end of forty days and forty nights, God gave me the two tablets of stone, tablets of the treaty."⁵⁶* We find no mention of any other object, such as a Torah scroll given to Moses.

55) See Ibn Ezra, Exod. 24:12 and the "Peirush al Ibn Ezra" for a number of views.

56) Deut. 9:10

We learn that Moses wrote the Torah, and God created the Ten Commandments. (Saadia Gaon views the Ten Commandments as the head categories for the remaining commands.)

What was God's plan, that there should be a Divinely designed "Ten Commandments" in stone, and that Moses would record the Torah? And we see the necessity for the Ten Commandments, as God instructed Moses to quarry new tablets subsequent to his destruction of the first set. These stones were necessary, even though they are recorded in Moses' Torah! What is so important about these stone tablets? Additionally, the Ten Commandments were uttered by God. Why? If He gave them to us in an stone form, we have them! Why is God's created "speech" required? Was it to awe the masses, as we see they asked Moses to intercede, as they feared for their lives at the sound of this created voice?

According to Maimonides, at Sinai, the Jews did not hear intelligible words. All they heard was an awesome sound. Maimonides explains the use of the second person singular throughout the ten Commandments: God addressed Moses alone. Why would God wish that Moses alone find the sound intelligible, but not the people? Again, Maimonides is of the opinion that the people didn't hear intelligible words during God's "oral" transmission of the Ten Commandments. This

requires an explanation, as this too is by God's will. We now come to the core issue of this article...

WHY MOSES PERCEIVED THE MIRACLE OF SINAI DIFFERENTLY THAN THE PEOPLE

Note Maimonides' distinction between the perceptions of Moses and the Jews. It appears God desired we understand that reaching Him is only through knowledge. God teaches this by communicating with the Jews at Sinai, but as Maimonides teaches, Moses alone understood this prophecy on his level, Aaron on a lower level, Nadav and Avihu on a lower level, and the seventy elders still lower. The people did not understand the sound. This teaches that knowledge of God depends on one's level. It is not something equally available to all mankind. God desires we excel at our learning, sharpening our minds, thinking into matters, and using reason to uncover His wisdom. The fact that knowledge is an endless sea contributes to the driving force behind Torah study. Our conviction that our studies will eventuate in deep, profound, and continued insights compels us forward. This excites us. It is not the amount of study, but the quality of it: *"Whether one learns much or little, provided his heart is intent on heaven."*⁵⁷

57) Tal. Brachos 5b: Rabbi Yochanan's words of comfort to Rebbe Eliezer

Sinai was orchestrated in a precise fashion. Maimonides uncovers the concept, which Sinai taught: in proportion to our knowledge is our ability to see new truths. Moses was on the highest level of knowledge and therefore understood this prophecy at Sinai to the highest level. He then taught this knowledge to the people, but they could not perceive it directly when it was revealed. God desired the people to require Moses' repetition. Why? This established the system of Torah as a constant reiteration of the event at Sinai. A clever method. Sinai taught us that perception of God's knowledge is proportional to our intelligence. Thus, Moses alone perceived the meaning of the sounds. You remember that earlier in this article we learned that the people were taught certain Torah commands prior to the event at Sinai. Why was this done? Perhaps it served as a basis for the following Sinaitic event which God knew they would not comprehend. God wished that when Moses explained to them what he heard, the Jews would see that it was perfectly in line with what Moses taught them earlier. There would be no chance that the people would assume Moses was fabricating something God did not speak.

God does not wish this lesson of Sinai to vanish. This is where Moses' writing of the Torah comes in. God could have

equally given Moses a Torah scroll along with the tablets, but He didn't. Why? I believe Moses' authority – as displayed in his writing of the Torah – reiterates the Sinaic system that knowledge can only be found when sought from the wise. It is not open to everyone as the Conservative and Reformed Jews claim. The system of authority was established at Sinai, and reiterated through Moses' writing of the Torah. Subsequent to Moses, this concept continues, as it forms part of Torah commands, "*In accordance with the Torah that they teach you... (Deut. 17:11).*" God commands us to adhere to the Rabbis. God wishes us to realize that knowledge can only be reached with our increased study, and our continuous, refined intelligence and reason.

Words alone – even in Torah – cannot contain God's wisdom. The words point to greater ideas, they are doors to larger vaults, and they, to even larger ones. Perhaps this is the idea that the Jews did not hear words. As the verse says, "*a sound of words did you hear.*" Maimonides deduces that no words were heard, otherwise, the verse would read "words did you hear", not "a sound of words". The Jews heard sounds with no words.

A PURPOSE OF THE TABLETS

We now understand why Moses taught the Jews commands before Sinai's miracles. We understand why it was Moses and not God who wrote the Torah scrolls. And we understand why God created the miraculous event at Sinai, as well as the system of transmission of knowledge. But we are left with two questions: Why did God create the Ten Commandments of stone? Why was the second set housed in a box?

Let us think; they were made of stone, both sets. The second set were housed in the ark. There was miraculous text on these tablets (Rabbeinu Yona, Ethics, 5:6). They contained the ten head categories for all the remaining commands (Saadia Gaon), and they were to remain with the people always.

Why did the tablets have only ten of commands? We see elsewhere⁵⁸ that the entire Torah was written three times on three sets of 12 stones.⁵⁹ Ibn Ezra states that all the commands were written on these stones. So why didn't the tablets given to Moses at Sinai contain all the commands?

Perhaps the answer is consistent with the purpose of Sinai: the system of God's knowledge is one of "derivation" – all knowledge cannot be contained in writing. God gave us intelligence for the sole purpose of using it. With the tablets

58) Deut. 27:3

59) Ramban

of only ten commands, I believe God created a permanent lesson: "All is not here so you must study continually to arrive at new ideas in My infinite sea of knowledge." Thus, the head categories alone are engraved on these two stones. This teaches that very same lesson conveyed through Moses' exclusive understanding of God's "verbal" recital of these very Ten Commands on Sinai: knowledge is arrived at only through applied thought. Knowledge is not the written word, so few words are engraved on the tablets. But since we require a starting point, God placed the head categories which would lead the thinker to all other commands, which may be derived from these ten. God taught us that our knowledge of Him is proportional to our intelligence. This is why Moses alone perceived the "orally" transmitted Ten Commandments. Others below him in intelligence, i.e., Aaron, his sons, and the elders, received far less.

This theory is consistent with Saadia Gaon's position that the Ten Commandments are the head categories of all remaining commands. Saadia Gaon too was teaching that God gave us the necessary "Ten Keys" which unlock greater knowledge. Saadia Gaon saw knowledge not as a reading of facts, but as it truly is: a system where thought uncovers new ideas, and that new knowledge opens new doors, ad infini-

tum. All truth is complimentary, so the more we grasp, the more we can grasp.

The tablets mirror the event of God's revelation, and the nature by which man may arrive at new ideas. Just as Moses alone understood the sounds at Sinai, and all others could not readily comprehend them, so too the tablets. All is not revealed, but can be uncovered through earnest investigation. Moses possessed the greatest intellect, so he was able to comprehend Sinai more than any other person. Just as Sinai taught us that intelligence open doors to those possessing it, the tablets too were a necessary lesson for future generations. They were commanded to be made of stone, as stone endures throughout all generations. Placing the second set of tablets in a box indicates that the Jews were now further removed from knowledge, in contrast to the first set. The text on the first set was a natural phenomenon, whereas the text on the second tablets was written subsequent to the tablets' formation. The first tablets' text was embedded in the material of the stones; a miracle that would have imparted greater knowledge, had the Jews seen it. These were meant to be seen, so no box was commanded.

Why was a “miraculous” writing essential to these tablets? Perhaps this “Divine” element continually reminds us that the Source of all knowledge is God. Only One Who created the world could create miracles within a substance, such as these miraculous letters. We recognize thereby, that Torah is knowledge of God, and given by God. These tablets are a testament to the Divine Source of Torah, and all knowledge.

We learn a lesson vital to our purpose here on Earth: learning is not absorbing facts. Learning is the act of thinking, deriving, and reasoning. “Knowledge” is not all written, very little is. Thus, the Oral Law. Our Torah is merely the starting point. God’s knowledge may only be reached through intense thought. We must strive to remove ourselves from mundane activities, distractions, and from seeking satisfaction of our emotions. We must make a serious effort to secure time, and isolate ourselves with teachers, with a friend, and alone, and delve into Torah study. Jacob was a “yoshave ohallim,” a tent dweller. He spent years in thought. Only through this approach will we merit greater knowledge, and see the depths of wisdom, with much enjoyment.

THE SECRET OF THE ARK

In Parshas Bamidbar, God commanded Aaron and his sons regarding the unique treatment of the Tabernacle's vessels. The Tabernacle housed the Ark⁶⁰, the Table of showbread, the Menorah and the Gold Altar used for incense. Outside of the Tabernacle's walls rested the Copper Altar used in animal sacrifice. God commanded Aaron and his sons, when preparing for journey, to cover these vessels. They should not be transported on the wagons in an uncovered state.

All but the Table had two coverings: a garment of dyed cloth, and an animal skin. (The Table had two dyed garments and an animal skin.) We wonder why the Torah alters the terms "garments" of cloth, and "coverings" of skin. Are they not both "coverings?" The Rabbis teach the purpose of the skins was to protect the vessels from the elements. This is sensible. But we are curious as to the purpose of these colored garments, and why they are called "garments."

All vessels excluding the Copper Altar were covered with a blue garment, while the Copper Altar was covered with a purple garment. Why this change? Additionally, all vessels had a single colored garment, while the Table alone was covered in

60) Not a "vessel" according to Maimonides' classification: Laws of the Chosen House 1:6

both blue and red garments. Of unique distinction was the Ark, for it was covered with the skin first, and then covered by its blue garment.⁶¹ In contrast, all other vessels were first covered with their respective colored garments, and then covered externally with skins...the reverse order. We also wish to learn of these specific colors; do they have unique meaning? Ramban explains that the blue garments reflect the heavens, as he quotes from Exodus 24:10, "*k'etzem hashamyim latohar: as the essence of the heavens in purity.*" So what did the purple – not blue – garment on the Copper Altar represent, and what did the extra red garment on the Table indicate? We will come back to this.

The laws and specifics I cite may be somewhat technical, but I ask your indulgence. My objective is that you come to appreciate how many laws and formulations that seem arbitrary and unrelated actually create a beautiful harmony.

These questions lead us to investigate more details pertaining to the Tabernacle. We are specifically interested in the Ark, as its blue garment was to be external to its skin covering, while all other vessels were to have the skins external to the garment.

61) The Ark was first covered by the Paroches: the curtain that divided between the Holies and the Holy of Holies. Above the Paroches was placed the animal skin, and then the blue garment last, on the exterior.

What was the purpose of the Ark? It is most unique in that its cover comprises two gold winged cherub figurines. The Ark contained the Tablets and the Torah. We learn that when God spoke to Moses, He created a voice that emanated from between these two cherubs and then penetrated Moses' ears. What consideration demanded this unique means of prophecy?⁶²

The Ark may rightfully be viewed as the centerpiece of the Tabernacle. But here's the strange part: Maimonides omits the Ark in his list⁶³ of the Tabernacle's vessels! Every other item is listed, except the Ark. And when he does finally⁶⁴ mention the Ark, he does not offer any details of its measurements or design, as he does when describing the other vessels. He discusses what seems as extraneous material: the stone upon which the Ark rested (the Evven Shessiyah)⁶⁵, the wall that separated the Ark from the other room, and other matters. But not a word of the Cherubim or the Ark's design! Astonishing.

62) Exod. 25:22

63) Hilchos Beis Habechira, 1:6

64) ibid chap. 4

65) Yoma 27b (Jerusalem Talmud) and Tosefta Yoma 2:12 cite the Even Hashessiyah, the stone from which the Earth was established.

It is also curious that Maimonides, when formulating these laws of Temple, includes this history of Solomon creating caverns to hide the Ark. These caverns have nothing to do with Temple law! We are also puzzled as to why King Solomon did not care to hide the other vessels. Does this teach that the Ark – and no other item – required complete secrecy? If so, what's the secret?

We do find Maimonides discussing the Ark later.⁶⁶ There, Maimonides teaches three laws: 1) that the Ark must be carried directly on man's shoulders and no other means; 2) the carriers must face each other's faces; not facing a uniform direction (face to back); and 3) the Ark's poles must never be removed. Alone, these laws deserve explanation. Even more intriguing is where Maimonides places these three laws: together in his formulation of the incense. He could have equally placed these laws in the previous chapter addressing the oil. We are at a loss as to Maimonides' juxtaposing of the Ark to the incense. There must be a connection, but what is Maimonides' lesson? And we must ask what is the purpose of the incense.

66) Hilchos Klay Hamikdash 2:12,13

THE VESSELS' COVERINGS

Although inactive while in transport, the vessels demand honor. These objects possess the God-given status of “objects of mitzvah.” We must treat objects used in mitzvah with greater care than mundane objects. Certainly, we must have a higher regard for items used in Temple service, for they are Kodesh (sanctified). Anything dedicated to Temple has an even greater status.

Now, although each vessel had a skin covering to protect it from the elements, God also commanded that each vessel have a “garment.” What is a garment? A garment is not always intended to cover, but at times, to highlight a distinction or delineate honor. Thus, a king wears unique garments and a crown. The High Priest also is elevated through his garments. The same concept applies to the Tabernacle’s vessels.

The vessels must be treated with honor. To do so, all vessels except the Copper Altar were dressed with a blue garment. Blue represents the created heavens and thereby we recall the Creator. This was to teach that each vessel contributed to some aspect of our knowledge of God. The Menorah’s seven branches related the idea of seven days in Creation. For our definition of God is the Creator. The Table contained twelve

loaves of showbread, teaching God's omnipotence, and the incense Altar teaches that God is omniscient, for He is aware of man's acts (offerings). So the blue garment is to highlight a vessel's contribution to our knowledge of God.

The Table had an additional red garment. Red is the color of blood, or human life. God feeds us by sustaining plant and animal life. The Table housed the 12 loaves of bread, which represents this sustenance. So it is reasonable that a red and blue garment be associated with the Table. For the Table teaches us about God (blue – pointing to knowledge of God, He is omnipotent to supply our needs) while also teaching that this sustenance preserves our very lives (red garment).

However, the Copper Altar was clothed with a purple garment alone. It had no blue garment. And there is an interesting idea here. Purple is the combination of blue and red. It is also significant that the Copper Altar was not inside the Tabernacle. I believe this was because the Altar does not contribute to knowledge of God, as do the other three vessels found inside the Tabernacle clothed in blue. The Copper Altar is used to sacrifice animals. Why do we kill animals? The definition of sacrifice traces back to the very first sacrifice. Adam, as soon as he was created, offered a sacrifice. He did so because, as Ibn Ezra teaches, he was a great intellectual.

Thus, he immediately realized that he was "created," and that his existence is not mandatory. Only God's existence is necessary. Realizing this truth, Adam wished to express this truth by proxy: he killed an animal to be in his place, demonstrating to God and to himself that this lifeless beast represents man's real state. Man does not have to exist. It is only through God's kindness that each of us lives.

In essence, sacrifice is the combination of two ideas: 1) human life is unnecessary, and 2) man's realization of the Creator and his reach towards a relationship with God. We must use sacrifice to constantly remind ourselves of our mortality, and that we are created beings. Human life (blood), God/Creator of heavens (blue) – red and blue create purple. The Copper Altar was clothed in a purple garment, representing this combination. And again, the Altar's placement outside the Tabernacle alludes to its different role: it is man's approach to God, which is of a lesser level than pure knowledge of God conveyed through the inner vessels. This lesser status is also conveyed through a lesser metal: copper is not as precious a metal as is gold. Above the dyed garments, skins were placed to protect the vessels from the elements. However, the Ark was first covered with the skin, and then the blue garment was placed over that skin. Why the reverse order of all other vessels?

TORAH: NO OBJECTIVE OUTSIDE ITSELF

The Ark required no service, *avodah*: its mere existence is the objective. Torah is not given with intent to serve any purpose. Torah exists to convey God's wisdom. Thus, the Ark that housed the Torah was not a vessel or utilitarian. To convey this idea, the blue garment was placed on the outside of the Ark. This was done to teach that the Ark was never compromised in its purpose, even while in transport...unlike the other vessels. The Ark, i.e., Torah, is always "active." We are to be in a state of contemplating God and His laws all day, as we read in the Shema. We must always see the blue covering on the Ark to remind ourselves that Torah is to always be engaged.

In contrast, the other vessels were utilitarian objects: their varied purposes were only realized when functioning in the Tabernacle and serviced by the priests. But when not in service, they were to be stored. They were to be covered with skins on the exterior to signify these vessels were inactive.

This also explains why Maimonides excluded the Ark from his list of "kaylim," vessels.⁶⁷ A vessel is something utilized. The Ark is not utilitarian in nature; it contained God's Torah. For this reason, the Ark's poles were never removed. For the

67) Hilchos Beis Habechira 1:6

Ark did not find a greater purpose while inside the Tabernacle or the Temple. The Ark is synonymous with Torah: God's wisdom. It needs nothing. It functions for itself.

This could very well explain why Maimonides groups the laws of the Ark together with the incense, and not the oil. For the incense was made for itself too: it was to be fragrant, as Maimonides teaches. That is, existing simply for itself. But the oil was "used" to anoint. It was utilitarian, unlike the incense and the Ark. And Maimonides' very formulation bears out this idea:

It is a mitzvah to make the anointing oil that is should be prepared for matters requiring anointing with it.⁶⁸

Whereas Maimonides' formulation of the incense reads:

The incense was made yearly, and its making is a positive command.⁶⁹

There is no mention of a "usage" in connection with incense, but the oil was "prepared for matters requiring anointing."

68) Klay Hamikdash 1:1

69) Klay Hamikdash 2:1

THE SECRET

There are some other questions pertaining to the uniqueness of the Ark.

Why did King Solomon create deep subterranean, winding caverns to hide the Ark?

Why did he not seek to hide any other vessel?

Why did Maimonides include this history in his laws?

Why did God command His Torah to be placed inside an Ark? This was actually a command even prior to the Temple, when Moses received the second Tablets.⁷⁰

The Holy of Holies was off limits by punishment of death to all who approached, as witnessed in the death of Nadav and Avihu. Man must accept ignorance of God's nature as a fundamental in our approach to God. No one was permitted to ascend Mount Sinai for this very reason, lest man feel he can draw "near" to God. Of course, God was not "on" the mountain – God cannot be localized, as He exists outside time and space. It is heretical to suggest otherwise. And we learn that 57,000 people were killed for looking into the ark upon its return from the Philistines. Why did they open the Ark? It is because they felt they could "see" something concerning God: a heretical notion.

70) Deut. 10:1

We must know: God is unknowable. *"For man cannot know Me while alive."*⁷¹ This fundamental is beyond the scope of Temple. It is for this reason that King Solomon treated the Ark with such secrecy even though he knew the Temple would be destroyed. This fundamental of man's ignorance of God surpasses the walls – and times – of the Temple. And since God's knowledge (the Torah) is the very identity of the Ark, Maimonides includes this history in his chapter addressing the laws of the Ark. This is not a historical record for history's sake, but to illustrate the nature of the Ark's uniqueness. Thus, this history belongs in the discussion of the Ark's very distinction and its laws.

Additionally, an Ark – by definition – is something that conceals. So it is not a mere container, but the Ark embodies this idea that God is concealed from man's intellect.

Why did Maimonides not discuss the Ark's measurements? I am not sure, but this is an interesting quote:

Rabbi Levi said, "We received a transmission from our forefathers that the Ark was not capable of being measured" (Talmud Megilla 10b).

71) Exod. 33:20

Rashi explains that the room where the Ark was housed (the Holy of Holies) measured 20 cubits square. The Ark was 2 cubits wide, so if it was centered in that room, there should be 9 cubits distance from the Ark to the walls, on both sides. The Ark measuring 2 cubits, plus the remaining 18 cubits of space would give the proper total of 20 cubits. However, when measuring the distance, there was found to be 10 cubits of space between the side of the Ark, and the wall. Meaning, the Ark occupied no space! I am less concerned with how this occurred than “why” such a miracle was necessary.

But we may answer that in line with the purpose of a room that is off limits, teaching that God is off limits to our minds, a miracle was created to embellish this very concept. Man’s mind cannot explain the existence of a three dimensional Ark that does not detract from the space of that Holy of Holies room. This inexplicable miracle enables man to then admit he cannot explain all, and thereby apply this acceptance of ignorance to his appreciation of God. Just as one matter is inexplicable, man can then accept God as inexplicable.

This then, is the “Secret of the Ark” – a secret that is never revealed. It is the unknowable nature of God. Although man is sensual, requiring his ideas be connected to the physical world, it is impossible that we might know anything about

God. Just as we cannot “see” a thought, also true is that we cannot perceive God’s nature. Even Moses’ knowledge must first emanate between two physical cherub forms before it penetrated his ears. Human knowledge must be tied to something physical. This is the purpose of Creation: that man have a physical universe through which we may all witness God’s wisdom, but never God Himself.

And as this is a truth independent of the Tabernacle and Temple, and predates both, Maimonides recorded the history of the caverns that Solomon built to hide the Ark. I believe Maimonides recorded this history in his law book because he wished to highlight the true essence of the Ark. The unapproachable Holy of Holies and Ark is to teach our inability to approach knowledge of God. This is independent of God commanding man to build a Temple. It startles us at first, that a law book contains historical data. But now we understand that this very history of hiding the Ark highlights the very nature of the Ark. Hiding the Ark was meant to teach that God is unknowable. Thus, Solomon did not seek to hide away any other vessel. For it is the Ark alone that teaches man of certain knowledge that is “out of reach” and hidden.

We now understand why in that chapter⁷² Maimonides also discusses the separating wall, for this too contributes to the “separation” between man and knowledge of God.

An interesting point is that this chapter starts with another historical fact cited in a few sources⁷³. The Ark rested on a stone in the Holy of Holies. This stone is called the “Even Hashessiyah,” the stone from which the Earth was established. The idea of a relationship between the Ark and the Earth’s foundation stone implies that the purpose of the Earth’s creation is realized in the objective of the Ark.

72) Hil. Beis Habechira 4

73) Yoma 27b, Jerusalem Talmud and Tosefta Yoma 2:12

SIN & PUNISHMENT

MOSES' MISSION AND PHARAOH'S FREE WILL

TWO PURPOSES OF THE PLAGUES

And God said to Moses, “Recognize, I have positioned you as a judge to Pharaoh, and Aaron your brother will be your prophet. You speak all that I command you, and Aaron your brother will speak to Pharaoh to send the Children of Israel from his land. And I will harden Pharaoh’s heart, 1) and I will increase My signs and My wonders in the land of Egypt. And Pharaoh will not listen to you, and I will place My hand to Egypt and I will take out My hosts, My people the Children of Israel from the land of Egypt with 2) great judgments. And Egypt will know that I am God when I stretch forth My hand on Egypt and I take out the Children of Israel from their midst (Exod. 7:1-5).

God instructs Moses to speak to Pharaoh that he should free the Jews. God tells Moses that he knows Pharaoh will

not free them, as He will harden Pharaoh's heart. God states the goal of hardening Pharaoh is to create wonders in Egypt, that Egypt will know God. One goal is for Egypt's edification and hopefully, repentance. The verse also indicates that there is another goal, "great judgments." What are these "judgments?"

An important principle is spelled out by the Sforno on Exod. 7:3. He states that God's plagues are to allow Egypt to *"recognize His greatness and goodness and repent in a truthful repentance."* We must recognize God's kindness in such an act: man sins, and is justly punished. However, before meting out punishments, God educates the Egyptians to their sin via the plagues. He does one more act to afford the sinners a path to repentance, and to circumvent any punishment. We learn that God works additional kindness and gives man opportunities to correct his ways, before receiving punishment, or the loss of his soul.

Just prior to the eighth plague, the Plague of Locusts, the Torah reiterates these two goals:

God said to Moses, "Come to Pharaoh because I have hardened his heart and the heart of his servants in order that I place these signs of Mine in his midst. And in order to speak in the ears of your son and your grandson that which I have mocked Egypt, and My signs which I have placed in them, and they shall know that I am God (Exod. 10:1-2)."

We must clarify the term "mock." When used by God, we cannot understand it as God expressing human characteristics of derision. To "laugh at", or to "mock", in connection with God, means He is assured of the sinner's downfall. So "certain" is God, it is as if He laughs, like a human would when he warns another of a negative result, yet the other person does not heed the warning, and inevitably suffers. The one who warned will say, "I told you so", as if to laugh at the ignorance of the other. God is said to "mock" Egypt, as their downfall was inevitable. God's warnings and knowledge are absolute, so one is wise to follow God exactly. Egypt didn't, so their devastation was certain.

Here we see a new point, a "mocking" of Egypt, explained as God's withholding Pharaoh from repenting – the hardening his heart. Rashi says this means a laughing of sorts. Ramban

says, *“I (God) laugh at him (Pharaoh) that I harden his heart, and do vengeance in him...”* From these two verses, we learn two distinct purposes in the 10 plagues: Verse 10:1 teaches: 1) that God multiply His wonders for Egypt to learn of Him, and verse 10:2 teaches: 2) that the Jews repeat this to their descendants that God removes Pharaoh’s (man’s) ability to repent, and that He and His miracles are made known. Clearly, Moses continuously approaches Pharaoh, knowing all too well that Pharaoh will not free the Jews. But Moses is commanded by God to do so, as God’s purpose is to 1) publicize His name and 2) demonstrate His justice as meted out in Pharaoh’s inability to repent.

This second point is not too well known. The plagues’ spectacular nature attracts our emotions to the visual phenomena. However, as 10:2 states, God also wished to “mock” Egypt. He desired that this principle of withholding repentance become clear. The Torah commentaries state, (paraphrased) *“...it is unusual that a man can face such plagues of Hail, Locusts, and the like, and still remain obstinate. Man’s nature is to be terrified, not to maintain his stubbornness.”* Such a steadfast attitude, even after receiving blow upon blow, is not natural for man, and must be by God’s word. Pharaoh’s resistance is to be a prime focus of the plagues. Moses’ mis-

sion is to bring out into the open this aspect of God's justice: when man is too far-gone, God will restrain him from repenting. The plagues are to demonstrate how God does not allow a terribly corrupt person to repent. Intuitively, we would think that any man who sins, should be afforded the ability to repent. Why then in such a deviant person, does God withhold repentance? What is the justice in this restraint?

QUESTIONS ON THE LOSS OF REPENTANCE

1) In his laws of Repentance, chapter 5, Maimonides teaches that man is always the cause of his free will. If so, what did God do to Pharaoh that prevented him from freeing the Jews and from repenting? How does God "harden" Pharaoh's heart?

2) If God hardens Pharaoh's heart, and therefore, Pharaoh does not free the Jews, is it just that God punished Pharaoh?

3) In his Laws of Repentance, chapter 6, Maimonides states that a person may sin a very evil sin, or sin many times, until the sentence from God will be to remove his ability to repent, and that the sinner die in his sin which he did knowingly with

his will at the outset. Maimonides states that Pharaoh's stubbornness is an example of this principle. What is the justice in this principle of removal of repentance?

4) In law 6:3 of his Laws on Repentance, Maimonides repeats eight times that the sinner sinned "on his own." What is Maimonides driving at? Ramban too states in Exod 7:3 that Pharaoh was punished with the loss of his repenting ability, as he initially sinned with his "own free will." How does this help us understand God's justice?

5) Ramban offers two reasons for the justice of Pharaoh's inability to repent. One reason given is that Pharaoh's repentance would not have been genuine, but merely a tactic to remove the ever increasing pain of each successive plague. As the plagues progressed, Ramban teaches that Pharaoh became more inclined to free the Jews, and he would have, after the fifth plague. However, God removed his ability to repent, and he did not free them. We must ask: if Pharaoh's repentance would not have been genuine, then what is the difference if he does or doesn't verbalize his repentance? Why does God deem it necessary that Pharaoh not utter his repentance, if it would be meaningless, as Ramban states?

6) In law 6:2, Maimonides says that repentance acts as a “shield” against punishment. Does Maimonides’ statement have bearing on this Ramban above? Is repentance an absolute protection against punishment, and therefore God “had” to prevent Pharaoh from uttering even disingenuous words?

THE PLAGUES’ PURPOSE: A POINT OF NO RETURN

Despite Pharaoh’s inability to concede to Moses’ demand, Maimonides states that Moses’ repeated approach to Pharaoh is to teach an important lesson:

In order to make known to those who enter the world, that when God holds back repentance from the sinner, he is not able to repent, but [rather] he dies in his evil that he initially committed with his own will.

We are taught a crucial lesson: man can sin to the point of no return.

Part of our human design – our free will – allows us to steep ourselves in corruption, to the point that we can no longer extricate ourselves. This was God’s lesson to the world through restraining Pharaoh from repenting. He is the prime example

of man's ability to reach a point with no hope for repentance. God publicized Pharaoh's corruption as an act of kindness to "all others who enter the world," as Maimonides states. God teaches an invaluable lesson. If we forfeit this lesson, tragically, we can lose our eternal life.

HARDENING OF PHARAOH'S HEART

There are a few ways to understand God's restraint on man's ability to repent. One is that man reaches the point of no return, so God merely "reflects" man's own corruption by withholding a disingenuous repentance. Rabbi Reuven Mann suggested a second theory: that man can do some form of repentance, but God does not allow him, as God's mercy grants repentance to man, but only up to a point, and no further. Accordingly, man is punished for the sins he initially committed on his own. God is kind to allow man repentance, but God determines for how long repentance remains available. So we must look at God's ultimate restraint on repentance in an opposite light: it is not a cruelty that He removes repentance, but a kindness that He tolerates sinners for so long. According to theory #1, man sins to the point where he is completely and irrevocably corrupt. He has the ability to go

through the motions of repenting to avoid pain, but God does not allow him this right. In this case, God mirrors the sinner's exact corruption: he cannot truly repent, so God does not allow the act of a useless repentance.

RAMBAN: PREVENTING UNAUTHENTIC REPENTANCE

Ramban indicates that repentance is a shield against punishments; the question is how. To reiterate, Ramban's second answer for God restraining Pharaoh from repenting is as follows: *"Pharaoh's repentance would not have been genuine, but merely a tactic to remove the ever increasing pain of each successive plague."* Therefore, he was not allowed to repent. Had he repented – even for this wrong reason – Ramban indicates it would have been effective in some manner. Thus, God prevented his repentance. How may we explain this Ramban?

Discussing this issue with Rabbi Mann, we agreed as follows: had God allowed Pharaoh to repent a disingenuous repentance, Pharaoh would justly deserve continued plagues, as the plagues' purpose of Pharaoh recognizing God would not be realized. However, Egypt would see Pharaoh "repenting" and would have a gripe against God's justice. They would not know that Pharaoh repented a false repentance,

and would feel God is unjust to continue plaguing Egypt. We may suggest this explanation for the Ramban: for this reason, God did not allow Pharaoh's false impression of repentance. Such repentance would be of no use to Pharaoh's perfection, but it mattered to others, to Egypt. Rabbi Mann stated that Moses too was concerned that if God justly killed the Jews when they sinned with the Golden Calf, Egypt would say that God failed and smote his people in the desert. Due to the concern that all mankind recognize God as just, Moses asked God, "*Why should Egypt say, 'With evil He took them out of Egypt to kill them in the mountains and to consume them from off the face of Earth'... (Exod. 32:12)?*" Moses did not desire Egypt to possess a false impression of God. What perfection Moses displays! Even after hundreds of years of bondage, Moses has concern for God's reputation in his oppressors' eyes. Moses teaches that we must be concerned that God's reputation be completely just. We care that all mankind obtain the truth.

**MAIMONIDES — FREE WILL AND A HARDENED HEART:
A CONTRADICTION?**

Maimonides states in his Laws of Repentance, chapter 5, God never removes one's free will. He calls this a "great fun-

damental.” This makes sense, as the Torah is a system where reward and punishment is a cornerstone. Thus, man must always be the sole cause of his actions. How then do we understand Maimonides’ theory on God hardening Pharaoh’s heart?

In his Laws of Repentance 6:3, Maimonides writes:

And it is possible that man sin a great sin, or many sins, until the judgment is given before the True Judge that the punishment for this sinner on these sins that he did with his will and his knowledge, is that repentance is prevented from him, and he is not allowed permission to return from his evil so that he should die and expire in his sin that he did...Therefore it is written in the Torah, "and I will harden Pharaoh's heart." Since he sinned initially by himself, and did evil to the Jews living in his land, as it says, "Come, let us be wise," Judgment was passed to prevent repentance from him, until punishment was exacted from him. Therefore, God hardened his heart.

As free will is a fundamental, how can God seemingly violate this principle by preventing Pharaoh from repenting?

Free will is always under man's control. But free will to do what? This is the key point: it is the free will to "select evil or good" that God places in man's hand unconditionally. However, God will – in extreme cases – remove our free will to decide another matter: repentance. Eight times Maimonides stresses that man chooses to do good or evil, of "his own will." He wished to clarify this point that free will is never taken away from man in this single area of choosing good or evil. Man will always be the sole cause of this choice. The Torah says this openly: "*See I place before you today, life and good, death an evil...and choose life (Deut. 30:15, 19).*" Moses tells the people that they may choose between good and evil. This is the area where man is always in control. But in the area of repenting, if man already selected evil, and corrupts himself so grievously, God will prevent his free will from selecting repentance, "so he may die and expire in the sin that he did."

There is no contradiction in Maimonides' words. God gives man free will to do good and evil, and never removes this freedom. In one area however, God does compromise man's free will: the area of repentance. Restricting Pharaoh from repent-

ing does not equate to God making him sin. Pharaoh sinned of his own free will, and so grievously, that God's justice demands he be removed from the system of repentance. Had Pharaoh been free to repent, he would avoid punishment he truly deserved. Maimonides argues with Ramban and Sforno on this point. Maimonides holds Pharaoh's repentance would have been genuine. This brings us to our next question.

If Pharaoh's repentance would be a genuine, why did God not allow him to repent? God allows others to repent! Perhaps it is possible that man sin with so much evil, that the normal repentance does not outweigh the evil. In normal cases, man sins, but then it is possible that his remorse for his evil is so genuine, that he is in fact not the same person who sinned. He has complete regret, and resigns himself to never sin this sin again. This is true repentance, when the new state of good in man completely erases any taint of the evil formerly held onto. As man learns the fault of his crimes, and sees clearly how hurtful his action was to himself or others, he now regrets his actions. In such a case, God completely forgives man, and *"none of his sins will be remembered (Ezekiel 18)."* But it can also happen, that a person sins, and repents, but his repentance does not completely correct his evil. Re-

repentance can only correct a person up to a point. Repentance can be an injustice, if someone sins so harshly, and would be let off. Just as free will to select good or evil is an institution that God never compromises, so too repentance is always accepted before God. Maimonides states this in law 6:2. This being so, the only solution is to remove repentance so Pharaoh and those like him pay for their crimes. It would be unjust to allow Pharaoh to escape punishment through repentance. How odd it may sound, repentance is not just in this case. The basic concept is that God forgives man, but only up to a certain level of corruption. Man may exceed forgiveness: a point of no return.

SFORNO

Sforno is of another opinion. He states that had Pharaoh desired to, he could have repented, as "there is nothing preventing him." If this is so, how does Sforno understand the verse that God "hardened Pharaoh's heart"? Sforno explains this as God giving Pharaoh the ability to "tolerate the plagues." As Sforno states, if God did not harden his heart, Pharaoh would have freed the Jews, but not out of a desire to subject his will to God, performing a true, complete repentance. Pha-

raoh would have freed the Jews only to avoid any further pain, “and this is not repentance at all” as Sforno says. Sforno differs from Maimonides and Ramban, in that he contests that God never inhibits one’s path back to God via repentance. Sforno quotes Ezekiel 18:23, “*Do I really desire the death of the wicked, so says God? Is it not in his repenting from his path and that he live?*” Sforno proves from this verse that God always desires, and makes available, one’s repentance. God did not remove repentance from Pharaoh, as suggested by Ramban and Maimonides.

SUMMARY

Moses’ mission was twofold: he was to assist in delivering the Plagues so Egypt and the Jews would recognize God. An idolatrous culture would be shown false, and God’s system of reward and punishment would be made clear. Additionally, some of our Rabbis teach that Pharaoh’s reluctance was publicized to teach mankind that we have the ability to sink into sin, so far, that we have no way of removing ourselves.

It is then so crucial that we all examine our ways, and not forfeit a true, eternal life, due to temporal emotional satisfaction, or false ideas.

ANIMAL BEHAVIOR

When studying the 10 Plagues, it is quite easy to get “distracted” by their miraculous features, thereby losing sight of the verses’ subtleties. More than anything, the Torah is intended to reveal God’s wisdom. To this end, millennia of Torah students, Sages and Rabbis have toiled in Talmud, Mishna and Scripture, training their minds, and as they learned the same areas year after year, they unlocked greater depths of God’s wisdom. We must be sensitive to what at first seems like unimportant data, and ask ourselves why God deemed “this” verse or idea to be included: “What is its lesson?” Let us take as an example, the Plague of Mixtures (of wild beasts) in Parshas Vaeyrah (Exod. 8:16-28):

And God said to Moses, "Arise in the morning and stand before Pharaoh as he goes to the river and say to him, 'Send My people that they will serve Me. For if you do not send My people, behold, I will send unto you, unto your servants, and unto your people and into your homes the Mixture [of wild animals] and the Mixture will fill the houses of Egypt and also the land that they are on. And I will distinguish on that

day the land of Goshen on which My people stand, that there will be no Mixture, in order that you shall know that I am God in the midst of the land. And I will place a salvation between My people and between your people: tomorrow this sign shall occur'." And God did so, and the Mixture came heavy [on] Pharaoh's house and his servants' homes, and [in] the entire land of Egypt the land was destroyed due to the Mixture. And Pharaoh called Moses and Aaron and said, "Go sacrifice to your God in the land." And Moses said, "This is not proper to do so, for it is an abomination to Egypt to sacrifice to God our God; for behold, if we sacrifice the abomination of Egypt in front of their eyes, will they not stone us? A journey of three days we will travel in the desert and we will sacrifice to God our God as He has told us." And Pharaoh said, "I will send you and you will sacrifice to God your God in the desert, however, do not travel too far, pray for my sake." And Moses said, "Behold I will exit from you, and I will pray to God to remove the Mixture from Pharaoh, from his servants and from his people tomorrow, however, let Pharaoh not lie, not sending the people to sacrifice to God." And Mo-

ses went out from Pharaoh and prayed to God. And God did as Moses' word, and He removed the Mixture from Pharaoh, from his servants, and from his people...not one was left. And Pharaoh hardened his heart also this time, and he did not send the people.

A number of questions arise:

1) Why did God deem the Mixture vital as one of the 10 Plagues? What is specific to this plague that it was perfectly appropriate for afflicting Pharaoh and Egypt? What were its lessons?

2) Unlike other plagues, here alone we see an emphasis of “sacrificing” to God, mentioned six times. Is this significant, and if so, how?

3) Why does God refer to this plague as (Arove) “Mixture?” Is this title significant?

4a) Pharaoh says, “Go sacrifice to your God in the land.” Moses said, “This is not proper to do so, for it is an abomination to Egypt to sacrifice to God our God: for behold, if we sacrifice the abomination of Egypt in front of their eyes,

will they not stone us?” Besides the practical ramifications of shielding the Jews from Egypt’s attack, is there another idea Moses instills in Pharaoh, with his “own” address?

4b) In general, aside from God’s administering of the Plagues, we find Moses addressing Pharaoh in his own words. Was Moses instructed to do so? We certainly do not see so in the text. And if he was not instructed, why did he address Pharaoh? Another instance is Exodus 9:31,32 where Moses is about to pray to God to halt the Hail. But before he does so, he tells Pharaoh, *“The stiff plants broke from the hail, while the softer plants survived”* (paraphrased). Why this interruption, and again, why was Moses addressing Pharaoh? We do not read that God commanded Moses to address him, other than the announcement of the plagues, and their description as per God’s words. Why the additional address by Moses?

5) When commanding Moses to warn Pharaoh, God instructs him to say the following: *“And I will distinguish on that day the land of Goshen on which My people stand, that there will be no Mixture, in order that you shall know that I am God in the midst of the land.”* We wonder what is this rarely seen objective of “distinguishing” Israel from Egypt. Is this God’s primary goal with

this Mixture of beasts, and that is why it is stated? If so, what is the underlying message? “Distinction” cannot be a lesson in itself. Distinction, by its very definition, is concerning some area; as in a distinguished scholar, where his knowledge is distinct from others. So we must ask, in what area did God distinguish the Jews via this plague? This question is compounded by the next verse where God states He will render a salvation for the Jews, not to be harmed by the Mixture. The distinction is made again. Why?

MOSES' ROLE

I believe Moses' address to Pharaoh teaches us a number of ideas. One idea stated by a Rabbi, is that Moses was necessary for the plagues, but not that God could not perform them without Moses. The Rabbi taught that Moses was necessary, so as to communicate the deeper ideas contained in each Plague. God did not merely plague Egypt with arbitrary miracles, but with signs and wonders which addressed certain flaws in Pharaoh and the Egyptian culture. They were intended to reveal insights necessary for the potential repentance and perfection. Without someone as wise as Moses, the perception of the plagues' underlying ideas would be missed.

PURPOSE OF PROPHETS

This also teaches that God desired that Pharaoh realize another concept: there is immense wisdom out there, and it can only be arrived at with use of the mind. God needs no emissary, but God sent Moses as a primary lesson to Pharaoh that man (Moses) arrives at true knowledge only when using the mind...as Moses demonstrated to Pharaoh.

This is quite a fascinating idea to me. We are so ready to accept Moses' leadership and role as emissary, but we overlook the very basic question: Why did God desire to send Moses, or send prophets in general? God could have accomplished the plagues on His own. This is a Torah and Maimonidean fundamental: prophets were sent, not because God needs anyone or anything, but because God wishes to teach man at every turn. And with the sending of prophets, man must realize that a great level of wisdom is required to understand our reality...God's created reality. The prophet is being sent, for he – to the exclusion of others – is fit to understand God, and teach man. This was a primary lesson to Pharaoh: "Your life of idolatry is based on the absence of reasoning, and you require education, through Moses." The most basic lesson to Egypt, and to all cultures today that are idolatrous, is that

the mind is not being engaged. If people did use their minds, even to a small degree, they would wonder why they are bowing to stone gods, and deifying men like Jesus.

ANIMAL BEHAVIOR

Moses too understood this. He understood his role and that is why he addressed Pharaoh; to explain the underlying messages and have the effect on Pharaoh and Egypt desired by God. In the plague of the Mixture of beasts, Moses tells Pharaoh that sacrificing to God in Egypt will get the Jews stoned to death. Moses means to address the very concept of animal worship. I believe this explains why Torah – in this plague alone – mentions the word “sacrifice” six times. For it is this plague that was sent to address the very problem of animal worship: sacrifice is the antithesis of animal worship! So the repetition of “sacrifice” in this plague alone indicates that sacrifice is central to the purpose of the plague of the Mixture. (God uses word repetitions in other Torah instances too, as subtle suggestions of an underlying Torah theme.)

Now, as Egypt deified animals, Moses directed Pharaoh to recognize this flaw. He told Pharaoh the Egyptians could not stand idly by as animals were sacrificed. For this reason, the

Jews were required to offer the Paschal lamb to earn God's salvation: they had to demonstrate their disregard for animal deification, and their trust in God's salvation from any stoning, and His deliverance of the nation to Israel.

But how did this plague attempt to correct Egypt's animal deification? It was through psychology. God sent multiple species of beasts that destroyed Egypt, including snakes and scorpions as Rashi stated, the very beasts we find on Pharaoh's headdresses. Thus, the Egyptians should no longer deify that which causes them much grief. When a person is alarmed at some phenomenon, he tends to no longer gravitate towards it, and this I believe was one of the objectives in this plague: to sever ties between man and animal.

Why were a "mixture" sent, and not a single species? A mixture was used as it generates a feeling of disdain toward animals "in general," not just a single species, which would allow the Egyptians to retain their deification feelings for other beasts. This explains why this plague was called "Mixture" (Arove). By generating disdain for animals in general, Mixture targeted this concept of diluting the Egyptian deification of elevated species.

One last question is why God desired to distinguish the Jews in this plague, in the "land of Goshen." The Rabbis an-

swer⁷⁴ that God displayed His control over all creation: Earth, the heavens and all that occurs in between, such as man's actions. Blood, Frogs, and Lice emanated from the Earth. The Mixture, Animal Deaths and Boils occurred "on" the Earth. And Hail, Locusts and Darkness occurred in the air or the heavens. God successfully displayed His control over all creation, by categorizing the plagues in this manner. (Nothing else exists but Earth, heaven, and all events) Of course, God also wished to smite the Egyptians' god, the Nile River with Blood, and there are many other facets to these plagues that we have not begun to detect or examine. As we stated at the very outset, God's wisdom is never ending. But man's is... so I will end with one last question: Why was the next plague Animal Deaths? Was it to act as a follow-up some how to the Mixture?

TWO WAYS WE SIN

Many people subscribe to the notion of "modernity", i.e., previous generations are archaic and not as advanced as to-

⁷⁴) Ibn Ezra 9:1

day and previous cultures' values are no longer applicable. Some cite "animal cruelty" in connection with Temple sacrifice. Additional rejection of the sacrifices of Yom Kippur may arise due to their association with a long day of fasting, standing, and many uncomfortable restrictions. Are the Temple's "ancient" sacrifices just that; archaic, inapplicable, and even brutal acts, deserving our abandonment? Must our religiosity comply with our subjective feelings, or must "we" comply with God's practices and ideas?

As Torah Jews who respect that all in our Torah is God's word, applicable for all time⁷⁵, we take a different road: we seek to discover the eternal truths contained in each of our precious Mitzvahs and ideals, instead of projecting our wishes onto them. As Torah Jews, we know all that God commanded does not expire, as man's nature does not expire. There is great wisdom in each command...if we patiently "seek it out like silver and buried treasures" as King Solomon instructs⁷⁶.

As was Adam's design and as the Jews at Sinai, so are we today: possessing their identical faculties and desires. As such, we are no less in need of the Torah's sacrifices and their lessons. The sacrifices would still aptly address our human nature today. It is only due to our sins that the Tem-

75) See Maimonides' 13 Principles

76) Proverbs 2:4

ple is non-existent, degrading us by its absence. Until the Messiah's arrival, may it be soon, and the Temple is rebuilt and sacrifice reinstated, we may still perfect ourselves to a great degree by understanding the underlying ideas of the Yom Kippur sacrifices. We must study the characteristics and requirements of the sacrifices. We must review the Torah, Talmud, and our sages, such as Maimonides, Ramban, Rashi and Ibn Ezra.

TWO GOATS

I will address just two of the Yom Kippur sacrifices: the two goats upon which a lottery was cast. Two goats – preferably with similar visual features, height, and cost – were presented in the Temple. The priest would blindly draw a lot, which contained both God's name and that of Azazel. Each goat was designated by the lot selected for it. The scapegoat – the one sent to its death off Mount Azazel – is described as “*carrying all the sins of the Jews.*”⁷⁷ The other goat dedicated as a sin offering in the Temple atoned only for the sins of the Jews in their defiled entry into the Temple sanctuary.

What is the reason for the goat's similarity? Why were their

77) Lev. 16:22

designations for either a sin offering in the Temple, or Mount Azazel, decided by a lottery? Why do we require two goats: cannot a single goat atone for all sins? What was significant about Mount Azazel? And why was there a service of clouding the Holy of Holies with incense where the Ark resided, included in the process of sacrificing these two goats?

Furthermore, we are struck by the Torah's placement of the Yom Kippur sacrifices in Achrei Mos⁷⁸ immediately subsequent to the death of Aaron's two sons who offered a "strange fire:" an offering not commanded by God. What was the gravity of their sin, that God killed them, and what is the connection between Aaron's sons' sin and the Yom Kippur sacrifices, that the Torah joins the two in one section? We also wonder what God means by His critique of Aaron's two sons, *"And you shall not come at all times to the Holy of Holies behind the Parochess [curtain] before the Kaporess⁷⁹ which is on the Ark, so none shall die...for in cloud do I [God] appear on the Kaporess".⁸⁰* What is the stress of "for in cloud do I appear on the Kaporess"? What is the significance again of "cloud?" And finally, why, after concluding the section on Yom Kippur sacrifices, does the Torah continue with the restriction of

78) Lev. 16:1-34

79) The Kaporess was the Ark's lid formed of solid gold, with the figurines of two cherubim – childlike creatures with wings.

80) Lev. 16:2

sacrificing outside the Temple, with the punishment of one's soul being cut off? In that section⁸¹ God warns the Jews about sacrificing to demons (imaginary beings) and also warns about eating blood, which also meets with the loss of one's soul. Maimonides teaches that the practice of eating blood was imagined by those sinners to provide them camaraderie with assumed spirits, and that those sinners would benefit by such a union. Although the questions are many, I believe one idea will answer them all.

THE SCAPEGOAT

What is the significance of Yom Kippur? It is the day when we are forgiven. What does "forgiveness" imply? It implies that we sin. And in what does man sin? This is where I believe we can answer all our questions.

We readily answer that we sin by deviating from God's commands. The worst sin, of course, is idolatry, where we assume the greatest error: other powers exist, besides God. If one assumes this fatal error, his concept of God is false, and his soul cannot enjoy the afterlife, which is a greater connection with the one, true God. This explains why those sinners

81) Lev. 17:1-16

who sacrifice to imaginary beings – demons – and those who eat blood, lose their eternal life. And even if these exact practices are not performed, but one harbors the thought that there exists powers other than God, be they powers assumed to exist in physical objects, or even in Hebrew texts or objects of mitzvah...such individuals also cross that line of idolatry.

The Scapegoat – the one goat sent to its death off Mount Azazel – was to atone for all our sins. Sin emanates from a disregard of God and His word, but its most grave form is idolatry. The Rabbis say that the Scapegoat is not sacrificed, but hurled from a peak downwards, to prevent us from assuming it is a sacrifice to those demons, normally associated with the wilderness surrounding Mount Azazel. By destroying the Scapegoat and not sacrificing it, we actively deny any claim of those desert-based demons, and deny truths about camaraderie with spirits by eating blood from sacrifices to demons. We wish to deny any and all claims of assumed powers other than God. Our atonement is effectuated through the Scapegoat, by admitting the fallacy of idolatry, and the rejection of any intelligent existence besides God, His angels, or man. Nothing else exists that is self-aware. Nothing but God, His angels, and man, possess intelligence, or capabilities other than natural laws. The Scapegoat thereby undermines

and utterly rejects man's path of Torah deviation. But there is another area of sin.

THE OTHER SIN

*And they brought before God a strange fire, which He had not commanded them.*⁸²

Aaron's sons Nadav and Avihu expressed the other area of sin: man-made, religious practice. Although we assume sin to be solely identified as deviation from the Torah as seen in idolatry, sin also exists when we attempt to approach God, but with our own devices, as the verse states, "*And they brought before God a strange fire...*" "Before God" is the operative phrase. Nadav and Avihu intended to approach God, not in accord with His ways, but with their own design. The Rabbis stated, "*The Jews desired to contain the Evil Instinct. It exited as a fiery lion from the Holy of Holies. They attempted to restrain the lion by seizing its mane, but it let out a loud roar.*" Regarding this Talmudic metaphor, a wise Rabbi once asked what is most significant. He answered, "The instincts were

82) Lev. 10:1

exiting the Temple's Holy of Holies". What does this mean? It means that man's instincts are most powerful – like a fiery lion – in connection with the most religious of activities and locations: the Holy of Holies. We need not look far to realize this truth, expressed today by ISIS. Religion is a great target for man's instincts, as in this area he is greatly passionate. In unguided religious expression, man's emotions will take over, as seen in Aaron's two sons who wished religious expression of their own creation. The existence of so many divergent man-made religions proves this point that man wishes subjective religious expression.

It is this sin, I believe, that the second Yom Kippur goat addresses. This second goat sin offering was brought in the Temple, and not sent to the wilderness as the other. For it is this goat that addresses man's sin in the Temple. Man sins in two ways: deviating from God, and in approaching God. God too addresses these two deviances with His commands not to add to, or subtract from the Torah. Subtracting from the Torah parallels the Scapegoat, where man abandons Torah and God in place of demons. Adding to the Torah parallels the sin of Nadav and Avihu who expressed an addition to the Torah's prescribed commands, corrected by this second goat brought in the Temple to atone for the Jews' sins in Temple.

GOD'S ARRANGEMENT OF TORAH SECTIONS

We now understand why God placed the Yom Kippur sacrifices in His Torah, between the sin of Nadav and Avihu and the prohibition to sacrifice to demons. It is because Yom Kippur sacrifice intends to address man's two areas of sin: the over religious sin seen in Nadav and Avihu, and the lack of religiosity seen in demon sacrifice, where one does not approach God, but runs from Him towards imposters. Yom Kippur atones for us by directing our attention to the two areas of human sin: non-religious, and over religious. We are alerted to apply this lesson to our own deviances. One who abandons Torah for other beliefs assumes more knowledge than God, as he feels he understands better how the world operates. He therefore creates his own "demons" and worships them. He is lacking an understanding of the One Creator, as he assumes different or multiple forces. The over religious person feels otherwise: he feels safe, as he "approaches God" as did Aaron's sons. He feels with his intent to serve God, anything goes. He feels he can create new modes of religious practice, and that he will find favor in God's eyes. But the Torah's response to both is death of some kind. Thus, "any" deviation – even when our intent is to serve God – is construed by God as sin.

The need for two goats is derived from our two areas of deviance. As one goat addresses the abandoning of God in idolatry, that same goat is unfit to address our faulted approach to God: idolatry is a far greater crime: idolatry errs about God Himself, while over religiosity errs about His will. But both goats are preferably identical, to teach that either goat satisfies one or the other requirement, since there is nothing in the goat per se that atones, but it is our understanding of these lessons that truly atones for us. The lottery also contributes to removing any significance to either goat, as each was picked by chance.

CLOUD

Why was clouding the Holy of Holies where the Ark resided, included in the service of Yom Kippur? And why was God's response to Nadav and Avihu, "*for in cloud do I [God] appear on the Kaporess?*" Cloud was also present at God's Revelation at Sinai. What is the connection?

Nadav and Avihu violated the principle that God is unknowable, by assuming they knew how to approach God. Thus, God responds that He appears in cloud. What is cloud? It represents man's blindness. Man is blind about God's na-

ture, and without Torah, man is also blind about how to approach Him. Nadav and Avihu's sin was their denial of their ignorance concerning God. God therefore reiterated to Moses and Aaron the concept of man's blind ignorance, by describing how He appears in cloud. And again in our yearly Yom Kippur service we must demonstrate our ignorance by clouding the holiest of all places, the Holy of Holies. Our religious practice must contain a service that demonstrates our limitations. Our atonement relies on a rejection of our instinctual, religious fabrication.

APPLICATION FOR TODAY

It is vital in our approach to God, that we are careful not to add to Torah commands, regardless of the popularity of new practices, even among religious Jews. Our barometer for what is God's intent, is God's word alone. We must not fall prey to our need for human approval, that we blindly accept what the masses of religious Jews perpetrate as Torah. If we are truly careful, and seek out authentic, authoritative Torah sources, we will discover what is true Torah, and what violates God's words.

In a conversation with a dear friend recently, I was asked

what I felt about certain Kabbalistic views. They included these: that cut fingernails are dangerous; that people might hurt us with evil eyes; that reciting the letters of God's name offers man power; and other opinions. My first response was that there is doubt as to the authenticity of the Zohar, and further, Zohar is not the Torah given by God at Sinai. But regardless, I told this friend that if an idea makes no sense, it matters none if a Rabbi wrote it, for even Moses erred; the most perfected man. Therefore, no man alive today is infallible. So quoting the Zohar is meaningless, if the idea violates Torah and reason.

God gave each of us a *Tzelem Elohim* – intelligence – that we must engage, and not ignore. Regardless of the prevalence of practices in religious Jewish communities, we have intelligence with which we may discern what makes sense, and what is nonsense. It matters none if the practice is a sacrifice to demons, or a practice that includes a Torah object like a mezuzah, a challah, even if one cites an accepted book authored by a Rabbi. We have the Torah's authentic principles to guide us towards reasonable practices. Just as demons and their assumed powers are imagined, so are the powers assumed to exist in challas, red bendels, mezuzas, or reciting Torah verses with the intent to heal the sick.

Religious deviance seeks substantiation by including Torah articles in man made practice. And as we learn from Nadav and Avihu, any deviation from God's commands – even to approach Him – is a sin. If you are in doubt about the validity of a practice, study the Torah, read the Shulchan Aruch, or ask a Rabbi to show you a source. But if you find no source for a given practice, do not follow it. And many times with your mind alone, you can uncover the falsehood in popular claims.

Yom Kippur is a time to break free from what is popular, comfortable, or falsely promises success and health. "*Teshuva, Tefila and Tzedaka*", repentance, prayer and charity, are what God says is our correct response. Do Teshuva from false notions and actions, regardless of their popularity, for you exist to follow God, not to impress your neighbor by copying their errors. Pray to God to direct you to new truths, to forgive and purify you, and to help you abandon fallacy. And if your Hebrew reading is not excellent, pray in English or in your own language, for prayer is meaningless if you do not understand what you recite. And give charity to recognize your insignificance, to break loose of your attachment to wealth, and recognize that God alone grants wealth. Assist others, recognizing Jew and gentile equally as God's creations, and show them pity, as you wish God to show you. Follow God's

laws alone to secure your good life, and do not continue in the sins of abandoning God, or attempting to serve Him in ways He did not command. The Scapegoat teaches that our imagination is destructive, and the goat sin offering curbs our over religious tendencies. We must learn where these lessons may apply to each one of us, for we all have false notions in connection with purely instinctual needs, and religious needs. Be guided by reason, and by God's precisely worded Torah. And may we all forgive, be forgiven, make peace with others, and enjoy a life of health, wealth and happiness that can only come from careful Torah adherence.

SUMMARY

As seen from these many sources, God encrypted His Bible – the Torah – with a profound design. Over thousands of years, from Sinai until today, Rabbis have transmitted hints to God's hidden messages and even employed God's style in their own writings, on a human level. Our teacher King Solomon wrote an entire work of metaphors called *Mishlei*, com-

monly translated as Proverbs. The Talmudic Rabbis wrote ag-gadda; metaphoric stories containing pearls of wisdom. Even there, "pearl" suggests what is rare and precious. A single word can convey many ideas.

In each Biblical account, God employed the perfect method of conveying truths, be it exaggeration, repetition, metaphor, interruption or one of many other styles. Such a system of knowledge embodies brilliance not found among men, but in God's words alone. No other book contains such wisdom and design, and this must compel us to dismiss all other religions as man-made, while the Bible alone testifies to the authorship of the Creator, blessed be His name.

It is my hope that I have adequately presented this fraction, yet representative sampling of Biblical wisdom that impresses you with God's writings. It is my wish that you now pursue a life where you *"minimize your mundane tasks and labors, and maximize your time studying God's Torah"*⁸³ through His Bible, Prophets, Writings, the Talmud and the Rabbis' writings.

83) Ethics 4:12

