

Another refutation of man praying to the dead Patriarchs (Radak, Jer. 10:7): "The idolaters did not think idols were God, but rather, intermediaries. Nonetheless, they are sinners, for there is no need for an intermediary between God and man." Thus, Calev would have sinned, had he truly prayed to the dead Patriarchs.

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Weekly Parsha

Ki Tisa

RABBI BERNARD FOX

"And now leave me and my anger will be expressed towards them and I will destroy them. And I will make you into a great nation." (Shemot 32:10)

Parshat Ki Tisa relates the incident of the Egel HaZahav – the Golden Calf. The basic outline of the incident is very clear. The

(continued on next page)

THE GOLD CALF & PLURALISTS: JUDAISM'S IMPOSTERS

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

Last week, two orthodox, New York Rabbis – Rabbi Yitz Greenberg and Rabbi Reuven Mann – presented to Columbia University students and concerned community members, opposing views on Judaism's assessment of "Pluralism": the view that God endorses and inspired plural religions, and not just Judaism. I attended this forum, and will offer my response next week in a special JewishTimes issue, featuring Rabbi Reuven Mann's rejoinder to Rabbi Greenberg. Rabbi Mann's sound reasoning, loyal to both the Torah verses and our foremost authorities like Maimonides, is required reading and will be next week's feature article.

The concept of Pluralism suggests various paths to God, a dangerous position. As an introduction to next week's issue on this theme, I refer to this week's Parsha, specifically, the sin of the Gold Calf. What was that sin? What can we learn from it? And, could the Gold Calf rear its ugly

(continued on page 4)



Rabbis Accepting Jesus:

Teachers ignoring Judaism's fundamentals endanger our youth to conversion and intermarriage. If you do not know Judaism's fundamentals, study them at this link below:

www.Mesora.org/13principles.html

If your child's school has no class on them, urge them to commence one.

JewishTimes
Special Issue Next Week:
"PLURALISM"

(Ki Tisa cont. from pg. 1)

Weekly Parsha

JewishTimes

Weekly Journal on Jewish Thought



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Torah explains that Moshe ascended Sinai. Moshe was on the mountain for forty days. The people became alarmed that he had not returned and assumed that he would not come back. They turned to Aharon and pleaded with him to create a deity that would lead them. Aharon created the Egel and the nation immediately initiated worship of this figure. Hashem tells Moshe that He will destroy Bnai Yisrael and create a new nation from Moshe's descendants. Moshe prays on behalf of Bnai Yisrael and succeeds in saving the nation.

It is not clear from the Torah exactly how many members of the nation were involved in the sin of the Egel. However, Malbim argues that only three thousand members of Bnai Yisrael actually participated in this sin. His argument is based on an interesting problem in the pesukim.

“And the children of Leyve did as Moshe had directed. And on that day, three thousand men fell from the nation.” (Shemot 32:28)

Moshe descends from Sinai. He breaks the Luchot – the Tablets. He asks those who remain faithful to Hashem, to rally around him. Shevet Leyve responds to Moshe's call. He instructs the members of Shevet Leyve to execute those who have sinned by worshipping the Egel. The members of Shevet Leyve execute three thousand people. However, these are not the only people that were killed in response to the sin of the Egel.

“And Hashem struck the nation because they served the Egel that Aharon had made.” (Shemot 32:35)

The Torah tells us that in addition to those who were executed by Shevet Leyve, others died in a plague that Hashem brought upon the nation. It is interesting that the Torah does not specify the number of people that died in the plague. This contrasts sharply with the account of the executions performed by Shevet Leyve. In that instance, the Torah indicates that three thousand people were executed.

There is a further question. Presumably Shevet Leyve killed those members of the nation that participated in the sin. Yet, a plague was necessary. Who did Hashem kill with the plague?

Rashi suggests that Shevet Leyve were only empowered to execute those members of the nation who were forewarned to not participate in the sin and then were seen worshipping the

Egel. Therefore, they could not execute all of the members of the nation involved in the sin. Some of the sinner had not been forewarned or were not seen participating in worship. Shevet Leyve was not empowered to judge and execute these people. The plague addressed this problem.[1] Malbim notes that the Sages suggest that those sinners, who were not executed by Shevet Leyve, were struck down by the plague.[2]

This explains why the plague was needed. However, the Sages' comments do not explain why the Torah does not reveal the number of people killed in this plague. Malbim raises another issue. The Torah describes the worship of the Egel as a public event. It seems unlikely that a significant number of people participated in this event and were not seen by witnesses. Although the Torah does not indicate how many people died in the plague, the very term plague indicates the number must have been significant. How is it possible that a substantial number of people participated in the sin and were not seen by witnesses?

Malbim answers these questions based in an earlier pasuk. The Torah tells us that when Bnai Yisrael left Egypt they were accompanied by a mixed group of people from other nations.[3] This group was composed of individual who were not members of Bnai Yisrael. However, they were impressed by the wonders they had witnessed Hashem perform on Bnai Yisrael's behalf. They decided to join Bnai Yisrael and follow them out of Egypt. The Torah does not explicitly tell us of the fate of the group – the Erev Rav. However, they quickly disappear from the narrative of the Torah.

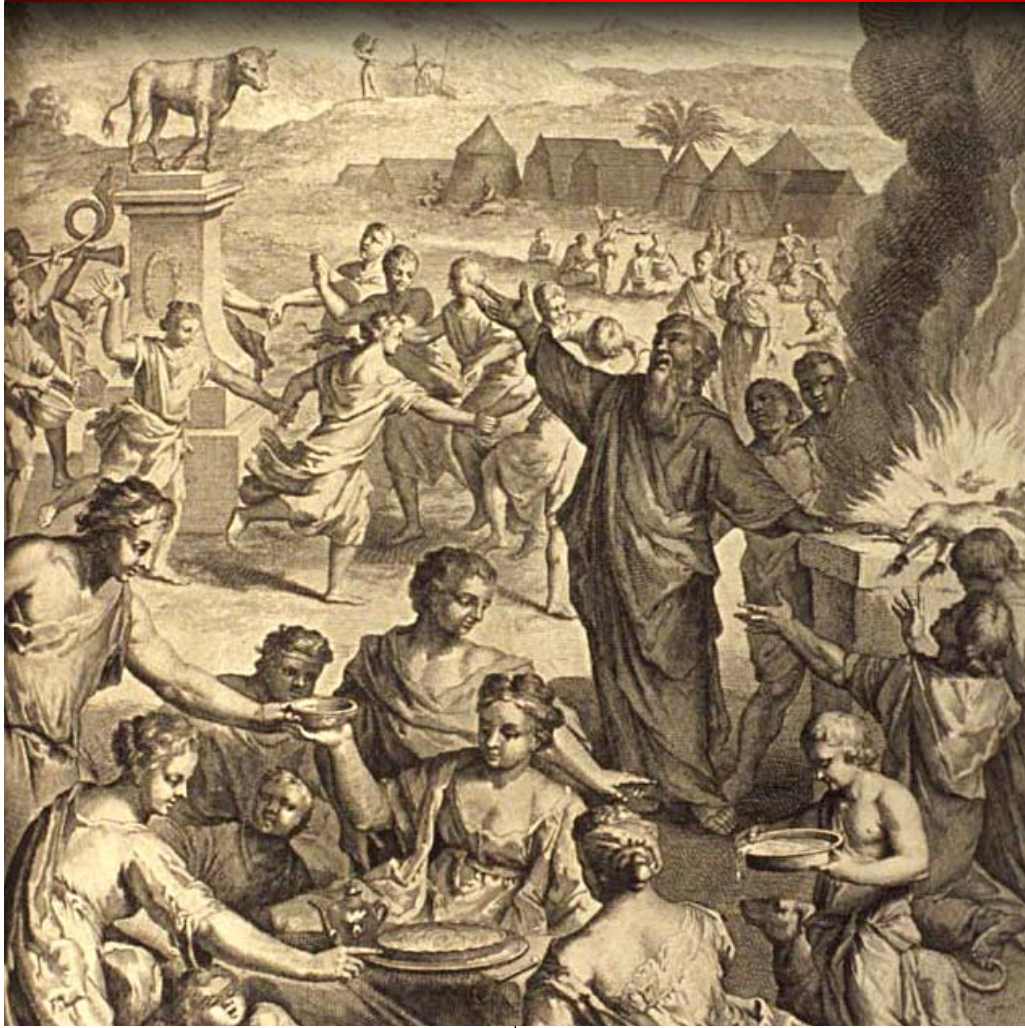
Malbim suggests that although only a small portion of Bnai Yisrael participated in the sin of the Egel, a large portion of the Erev Rav were involved in the sin. Therefore, among Bnai Yisrael there were many innocent people that forewarned their neighbors to not worship the Egel. If their forewarning was disregarded these same individuals were available to serve as witnesses of the sin. Shevet Leyve relied on these innocent people in order to judge and execute those who were guilty of worshipping the Egel.

In contrast, among the Erev Rav there were few if any innocents who forewarned their neighbors. And there were few members of the Erev Rav who were untainted by the sin of the Egel and qualified to testify against others. Therefore, Shevet Leyve was not empowered to punish members of the Erev Rav who had participated in the sin.

(continued on next page)

(Ki Tisa continued from page 2)

Weekly Parsha



Malbim suggests that these members of the Erev Rav who went unpunished by Shevet Leyve were killed by the plague.[4] Malbim's insight explains why the Torah does not indicate the number of people killed by the plague. The Torah indicates the number of members of Bnai Yisrael executed by Shevet Leyve because this information is relevant to the narrative of the Torah. The Torah is describing the development of the Jewish nation. However, the Erev Rav was not part of Bnai Yisrael. After this incident, the Erev Rav was decimated and no longer significant. Therefore, the number of members of the Erev Rav killed by the plague is not treated as a significant element of the narrative.

Malbim's position raises an important question. According to Malbim, the three thousand people executed by Shevet Leyve represent the entire portion of the nation that worshipped the Egel. Yet, Hashem tells Moshe that because of this sin He wishes to destroy Bnai Yisrael. This seems like a remarkably harsh punishment. How could Hashem destroy an entire nation because of the sin of a relatively small minority of its members?

Sforno addresses this question through a remarkable analysis of another issue.

“And he said to them, “So says Hashem the G-d of Israel: Each man should place his sword on his thigh and pass back and froth from one gate to the other in the camp. Each man should kill his brother; each man should kill his friend and each man should kill his relative.” (Shemot 32:27)

Moshe addresses the members of Shevet Leyve. He tells them that Hashem expects them to act as executioners. They are to execute all those guilty of the sin of worshipping the Egel. They may not show mercy to brothers, friends or relatives. Any person who is judged to be guilty must be executed.

Sforno is bothered by a problem in this passage. Moshe begins by instructing the members of Shevet Leyve to pass back and forth through the camp. Why did Moshe add this detail to his instructions? Sforno suggests that Moshe was instructing Shevet Leyve to perform its task as publicly as possible. The

sinner were to be judged and then executed in the open. The actions of Shevet Leyve should be observed by the entire nation.

Why was Moshe concerned with creating a public display? Sforno suggest that this was a fundamental element of the punishment! How?

Sforno is bothered by another problem. He assumes that only a portion of Bnai Yisrael were involved in the worship of the Egel. What was the attitude of the rest of the nation? Why did the rest of the nation not take action to prevent the creation of the Egel and its worship? He concludes that although only a small portion of the nation actually worshipped the Egel, many others stood by passively and did little to prevent their neighbors from violating the prohibition against idolatry – one of the most important injunctions of the Torah. They could have acted responsibly and forcibly prevented the sin from taking place. But they could not bring themselves to take aggressive action. As a result, the sin of the Egel took place. In other words, the sin was the result of the actions of the few and the passivity of the majority.

Hashem wanted to punish both those who sinned actively by worshipping the Egel and those who sinned through their passivity – by not taking the action necessary to prevent the sin. The sinners were punished by death. Those who failed to act were punished by being forced to watch the executions. They had been unable to take action against their friends. They would not watch the executions of these same friends.[5]

Sforno's insight explains Hashem's response to the sin of the Egel. It is true that only a small portion of the nation was actively involved in the sin. However, the Egel could not have been created or worshipped without the passive acquiescence of the many others. Hashem suggested to Moshe that the nation deserved to be destroyed. They deserved this punishment because of the sin of the few and the passivity of the majority. ■

[1] Rabbaynu Shlomo ben Yitzchak (Rashi), Commentary on Sefer Shemot 32:20.

[2] Rabbaynu Meir Libush (Malbim), Commentary on Sefer Shemot 32:35.

[3] Sefer Shemot 12:38.

[4] Rabbaynu Meir Libush (Malbim), Commentary on Sefer Shemot 32:35.

[5] Rabbaynu Ovadia Sforno, Commentary on Sefer Shemot, 32:27.

(Gold Calf continued from page 1)

Idolatry

head again in today's modern culture and Jewish communities?

Upon the Jews miscount of a complete 40 days – Moses' scheduled descent from Mt. Sinai – the Jews approached Aaron, asking him to “make for us gods that will go before us, for this Moses, the man, who took us out of Egypt, we know not what has happened to him.” (Exod. 32:1) In verse 4 after the Gold Calf's creation, the Egyptians who joined the Jews in their mass exodus, told the Jews: “these are your gods Israel, which took you out of Egypt.” (Rashi, 32:4) Ramban comments, “No fool in the world would think that this gold that was in their ears (from which they crafted the calf) is the God that took them out of Egypt. Rather [they felt] some ‘force’ of this form [the Calf] is what took them out.” Ramban adds that the Jews did not think this Calf was God, but a replacement for Moses, as the verse above indicates. So if the Jews did not think the Gold Calf was God, what was their sin?

In his Mishneh Torah, Maimonides formulates Jewish laws with the height of precision, succinct and exact verbiage, and refined definitions. His opening chapters in Laws of Star Worship (idolatry) are essential to our discussion on Pluralism. Maimonides defines the “great error” of the original idol worshippers, who originated as star worshippers. Their mistake was in assuming that God's designation of the stars as ‘governing the universe’ was an honor God bestowed upon the stars, which in fact earned them the right to be worshipped, praised, glorified and honored, since the stars minister before God. These star worshippers assumed this ‘greatness’. Maimonides states these worshippers thought they fulfilled God's will with their idolatry, but Maimonides calls this “evil thought”. Maimonides is quite clear: these worshippers did not assume God not to exist, but rather, as he quotes from Jeremiah “Who does not fear You, King of the nations”. (Jeremiah, 10:7,8) But their error was in thinking such star worship to be God's will. (ibid, 1:1)

In chapter 2, Maimonides makes a number of salient points when formulated laws concerning idolatry:

“The central command against idolatry is not to worship anything created.” (2:1)

“One must not go astray in the thoughts of his heart to serve these [idols, stars] that they should be an intermediary between you and God.” (2:1)

“And not only is idolatry prohibited to go astray after it in thought, but any thought that causes man to uphold a fundamental of the Torah, we are warned not to enter it into our hearts.” (2:3)

“Any Jewish heretic (apikores) is no longer

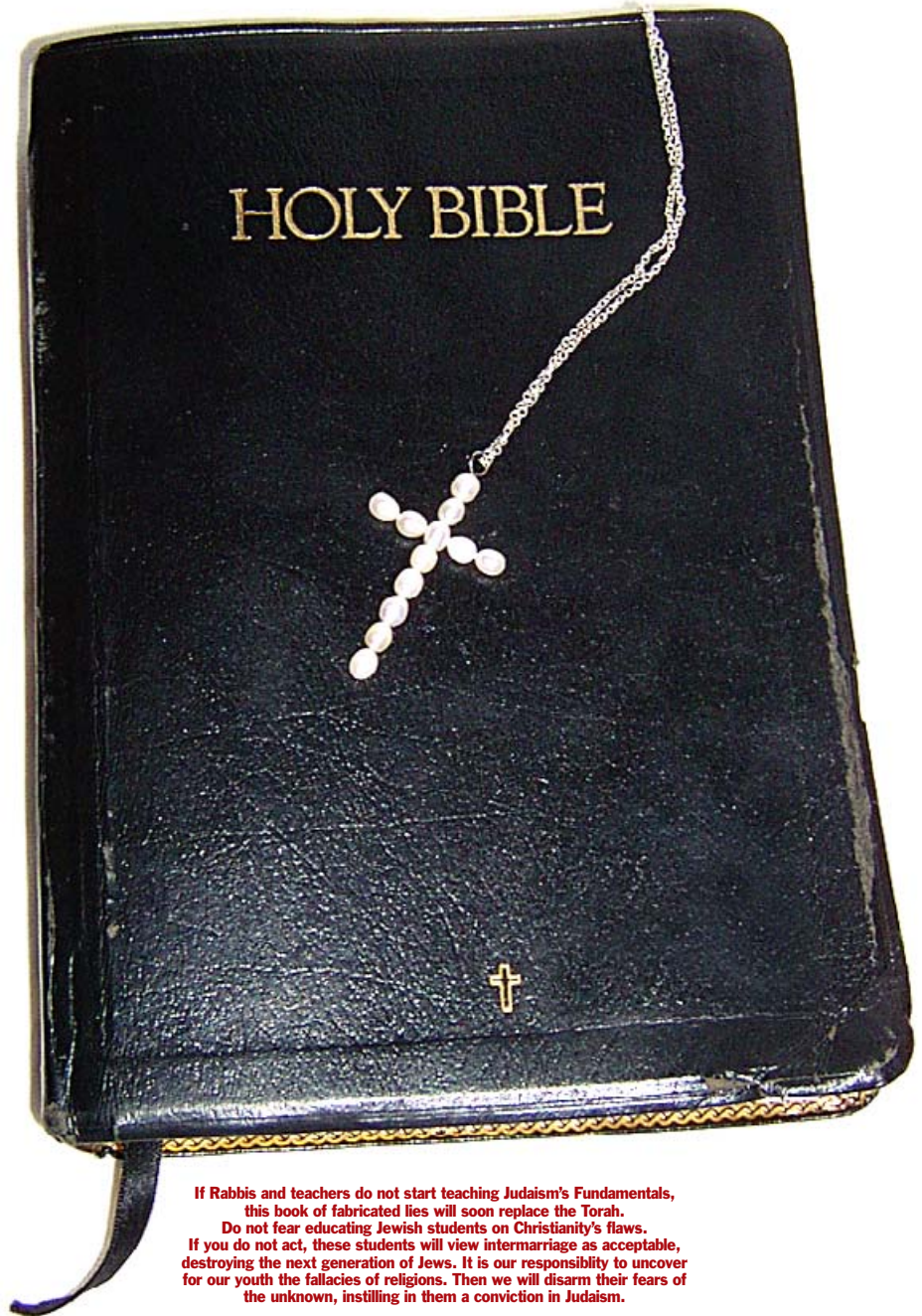
Jewish in any measure, and is never received in his repentance, forever.” “And the heretics are those who go astray after their hearts' thoughts in their foolish words that they state, until they violate the Torah's fundamentals, despicably in spite with an outstretched hand, and they claim that they are not sinning. It is forbidden to speak with them and to respond upon them with any response at all.” (2:5)

“And anyone who admits to idolatry that it is truth, even though he does not worship [himself] he disgraces and scorns God's

honored and awesome name.” (2:6)

Heavy words? Yes, as it is a heavy crime, for which a heretic “cannot repent”, and causes others to forfeit their eternal souls as well. Once we encounter such heretics in our course of teaching Torah, we must disengage, for one who admits of the truth of idolatry, blasphemes God's name. It would then be our obligation to steer others away from hearing such heresy, as Maimonides does himself, with his very words here. “Not responding at all to them”, must then be understood as in-

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If Rabbis and teachers do not start teaching Judaism's Fundamentals, this book of fabricated lies will soon replace the Torah. Do not fear educating Jewish students on Christianity's flaws. If you do not act, these students will view intermarriage as acceptable, destroying the next generation of Jews. It is our responsibility to uncover for our youth the fallacies of religions. Then we will disarm their fears of the unknown, instilling in them a conviction in Judaism.

(Gold Calf continued from previous page)

Idolatry

Christianity:
 Its appeal is its effective marketing: it generates empathy via its mascot, a dying Jesus nailed to a cross. Since its tenets are bereft of reason, and has no proof to Divine origin as does Judaism, it demands blind faith, and crusades against non-believers with swords and fear tactics of eternal damnation in an imagined hell. Christianity scares people into a false religion. Judaism asks man to use his intellect, as in all areas of truth.

person “interfaith dialogue” with any idolater, or Jew, who accepts another religion, or another religion’s heresy. And as Maimonides teaches us with his very writings in this chapter, we must teach and write against heretics and heresy.

But whom did Maimonides define as a heretic?

“And the heretics are those who go astray after their hearts’ thoughts in their foolish words that they state, until they violate the Torah’s fundamentals, despicably in spite with an outstretched hand, and they claim that they are not sinning.”

Meaning, if any Jew says his heretical opinions are not sins – claiming his view represents the Torah – this person is a heretic, and no Jew is allowed to speak to him. And what would be a heretical position? Maimonides says that which “violates Torah’s fundamentals”. Finally, what is a Torah fundamental? Well, Maimonides has already classified his 13 Principles...one if which is that God is not akin to the physical world, and another, that the Torah is true. Therefore, any position that contradicts the Torah or claims that God is physical, is a violation of fundamentals, it defines one as a heretic, and prohibits any Jew from engaging with him or her in dialogue.

Christianity claims that God became man (Jesus). Christianity altered the Torah, claiming, “Jesus died for our sins”, which contradicts God, “Each man in his own sin will die” (Deut. 24:16) Christianity embodies these two heresies exactly. Now, if any Jew would suggest that Jesus or Christianity represents truth, or worse, that this religion is inspired by God...such a person is a heretic. This must be clear to you: any Jew who claims Judaism accepts Jesus or Christianity, denies Torah fundamentals, and according to Maimonides, is a heretic.

It must also be clear to our Gentile readers as well as our Jewish readers, that Judaism in no way

accepts Jesus, Christianity or any other religion. This is not animosity towards a “people”, but a denial of dangerous notions that cause man to lose his one and only chance at life. Christianity had no revelation from God; yet, they lie to their adherents, and as Islam, they both wage crusades against non-believers, since reason and proofs are not on their side. It would be evil for anyone to remain silent, when he or she can redirect lost souls – Jew or Gentile – toward a life of truth. God gave one religion, and no proof exists to contradict this. It is also the Jews’ obligation not to seek approval from other religions, but conversely, to openly and honestly expose the falsehoods that exist in idolatrous religions, or religions that deviate from God’s only Judaic religion. To do otherwise is cruel to other peoples, who God created equally as He created Abraham’s descendants. The Noachide movement – and I know some special Noachides who far exceed many Jews in their perfection – is a grand display of thinking individuals who questioned their Christian roots, and realized “fallacy I have inherited from my forefathers”. (Maimonides’ Laws of Kings, 11:12) They studied Torah, and realized with thought and proofs, that only Judaism is of Divine Origin.

Those Jews who seek “Interfaith Dialogue” are hurting everyone involved. They hurt Christians, as they communicate acceptance for an idolatrous religion maintaining ludicrous postulates: “God is killed, He becomes man, and then changes His mind and alters His previous Torah”. And they hurt Jews, as their dialogue communicates a denial of clear, Torah fundamentals. These Jews will sell their souls, and sell out Judaism and God...all for what? Publicity? Acceptance? Money? Fame? What these corrupt, Jews-turned-heretics care for more, is human applause. But they forget that in a few years, they have to answer to God.

God’s Torah system demands that three

commands never be violated, even when faced with death: adultery, murder, and idolatry. This teaches how far we must go to avert anything idolatrous. If anyone – Rabbis included – claim any recognition for idolatry, Jesus or Christianity, we must be careful not to let our fears, or their reputations cloud our knowledge of God’s words. We must not “fear man.” (Deut. 18:22) We must be concerned for others, and speak the truth with clarity and passion, explaining the evil and dangers involved, and never compromise that, which our minds tell us is false. It is then up to those listening to determine for themselves if they find truth in our words. And it is up to them to decide their actions. All we can do is educate...and we must.

The sin of the Gold Calf was one where man did not say the Calf was God, but they assumed its worship was “God’s will”, the identical sin Maimonides describes regarding the first star worshippers. When man assumes he knows God’s will for our religious practice, man violates the prohibition of idolatry. Be it the Jews at Mt. Sinai, or a Rabbi today leading Jews astray to accept Jesus, (excusing Jesus as a “failed Messiah, and not a false one”), both violate idolatry; both claim, “there is no sin as I represent Judaism”, and both are classified as heretics, with whom dialogue is prohibited. Both are imposters.

Unfortunately, today, the Gold Calf is alive and well, cloaking itself as Pluralistic Rabbis. It is therefore more vital than ever that Jewish educators incorporate Judaism’s fundamentals into their curriculums. For if a Rabbi can fall prey to other religions, certainly with no education of our fundamentals, our children will also succumb.

There exists only one “mankind”. Therefore, there can exist only one best lifestyle, meaning, one true religion, equally applicable to all cultures and nations. As we all descend from the same couple, Adam and Eve, we all are one mankind. Every single man and woman is identical, psychologically and metaphysically – despite race or nationality. Therefore, there are no grounds to suggest identical beings require divergent religions. God certainly did not say so, therefore, do not fear man.

I truly hope that more educators and Rabbis will be less fearful of human opinion than of God, taking pride in our heritage, and taking responsibility to speak out against blatant violations of our fundamentals in our Jewish communities. For it is lies that require the constant alliance of mans lips to exist, while truth needs no defense and can be readily seen, if taught. So speak the truth. Others will recognize it, for God’s world corroborates truth, not lies. Do not allow this generation to become Pluralists. Do not cower from liars.

We will continue next week. ■

TALI

Next Generation of Shiurim

RABBI PINCHAS ROSENTHAL

Chanoch Le'naar al pi darcho
Torah Academy of Long Island
Torahacademyli.org

Welcome to the Torah Academy of Long Island's innovative online learning program of "Next Generation Shiurim". Our goal is to provide models of interactive learning that will empower parents to engage their children in meaningful 21st century dialog concerning the transcendent truths of Torah.

The need for this is greater now than ever. Despite the recent upsurge of baalei teshuva, Faranak Margolese has noted a powerful counter-trend in her astounding work, *Off the Derech*. Observant Jews are leaving the fold in increasingly larger numbers. And lest we feel that our children are protected from these trends because of their yeshiva or day school educations, according to Margolese's research, over 70% of those who leave Orthodoxy cite negative experiences in Jewish education as being at least partly responsible for their defection. Every yeshiva has as its stated purpose the securing of Jewish tradition for the next generation. Yet, although we have more yeshivot than ever before, and greater numbers of students enrolled in them, many formerly observant young people feel that their yeshiva experience lacked relevance to their lives. Their yeshivot did not properly prepare them for the challenges of living in an intellectually open society.

Quite simply, Jewish education is not providing the impetus needed to inspire our young people with the intellectual power of Torah learning. This is because the model of Torah learning currently in use in most yeshivas originated in the ghettos of Europe. Its primary goal is the rote mastery of large amounts of material - learning to read and translate as many pasukim and associated Rashis as possible. Discussion and questioning are discouraged. Difficult issues are not dealt with. This model may have been of some value two hundred years ago. Its value today is questionable at best.

We already have a paradigm for an ideal "lesson" in Torah - one that encourages meaningful parent-child exchange and that even comes with its own study guide - the Pesach Seder and the Haggadah. In modern educational terminology, the Seder is a multi-sensory, hands-on, active learning experience

stressing differentiated instruction in order to meet the needs of each type of child present (represented textually by the four sons). It is the father's role to structure the presentation of the textual material in such a way as to help each child gain insights appropriate to his/her level. The symbols of the Seder, and the structure of the evening, are designed to elicit active learning on the part of even the youngest child present by stimulating thoughtful questions.

Therefore, each TALI "Next Generation Shiur" will seek to provide a sample "Haggadah" for a specific topic in Jewish learning. We will provide you with textual assistance in framing this topic (the Parent's Edition), and then pedagogic tools for adapting this in your family. The principles of the shiurim will be developed through the use of contemporary examples and thoughtful questioning that will hopefully elucidate the topic.

TALI - NEXT GENERATION OF SHUIRIM
PARENT'S EDITION
Chanoch la'naar al pi darcho

MEGILLAS ESTHER AND HASHGACHA

The Megilla describes the Jewish people in an everyday, political environment totally lacking any reference to hashgachas Hashem or miracles. This absence of reference to hashgacha stands in stark contrast to the story of Yetzias Mitzraim where the



TALI Leadership:

Rabbi Pinchas Rosenthal, Dean (left)
Lewis Barbanel, President/Talmudic Educator

miraculous makkos take center stage. The naturalistic mode of the Megilla is so complete that God Himself is not mentioned by name in the story.

The midrash, on the other hand, goes to the opposite extreme. The midrashic take on the story makes constant reference to hashgacha. I have chosen two well-known examples as cases in point of the midrash's hashgacha oriented perspective.

A) Esther, whom the Megilla describes as beautiful, the midrash portrays as actually having a bizarre green color. (Megilla 13a).

B) The Megilla depicts Achashverosh as randomly reading in the sefer hazichronos that Mordecai had saved his life. The midrash attributes this event to the intervening action of an angel. (Megilla 16a).

The first approach to the problem of tension between the naturalistic megilla and the hashgacha oriented midrash could be to refer to the principle that

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(TALI continued from previous page)

Excellence in Education

there are no random events governing Jewish history. The mere appearance of normality does not preclude a hidden hand of hashgacha underlying the everyday events and dictating a course necessary for Jewish survival. This principle, while true, does little to resolve our difficulty however. Based upon this principle one would not need the midrash at all - once the principle that all events vital to Jewish continuity are subject to hidden hashgacha has been established, what additional insight have I gotten from the midrash? The Talmud always asks "pshita" which means to say "what additional clarification have I gotten in such a case?" Indeed, this approach reduces the whole megilla to pshita. Is all that can be gleaned from the painstaking account of Mordechai and Esther as guided by ruach ha-kodesh that Purim is but another instance of the well-known fact that the Jewish people enjoys hidden hashgacha?

The truth is that the midrash comes to guide us in the exact application of the principle. To know that there is hashgacha is not the same as seeing exactly how it expresses itself in the natural world. To apply the principle to specific cases one must have the depiction of events guided by ruach ha-kodesh as well as midrashic clarification. Specifically, the midrash must shock us out of our predisposition to ignore breaks in normal affairs that are the gateway to perceiving the hidden hand of hashgacha.

The above two midrashim are a case in point. We see from the story that King Achashverosh was a highly volatile man. Queen Vashti, despite her great charm, had been unable to maintain his affection. Esther as well, despite her beauty, had also not held King Achashverosh's interest for long. As she said to Mordechai, she had not been summoned to the king for quite a while. From the Hollywood experience we know very well how fragile relationships between the rich and famous are. How deep a relationship can a man have, who picks his wife based upon a beauty pageant?

It was not Esther's beauty that moved Achashverosh to pick her nor was that the factor that caused him to accede to her request to save the Jews. It is our own Hollywood reinforced predisposition to overestimate the power of beauty that keeps us from noticing this ourselves.

Esther, as the midrash points out, though good looking, was by no means a perfect "ten". She had some distinct drawbacks as a beauty queen that normally should have disqualified her from the interest of a superficial person such as Achashverosh. In reality she had no more chance of winning the pageant than if she had been green.

What saved the day for the Jews then was not the power of beauty, but rather the power of wisdom. In order to save the Jews, Esther played upon the jealousy of her husband for Haman. She knew that underlying his loyalty to Haman must exist a deep concern. Perhaps Haman did not have his interests in

mind!! This concern, while real, was not acted upon because of the benefit playboy Achashverosh got from Haman. It was Haman's hard work as chief minister that allowed Achashverosh to play all day. By inviting Haman to a private party with Achashverosh, Esther cleverly provoked the king's insecurities. "Has my reliance upon Haman caused me to lose favor in the eyes of my queen?" "It was this insecurity that disturbed the king's sleep.

Clever as Esther's plan was, it was not a sure deal. Human emotions are very unpredictable, as Vashti had already found out. Indeed the history of diplomacy is riddled with great schemes gone awry. Once again we need to be shocked out of a predisposition to believe in the power of our own schemes to see what is right in front of our eyes. It was surely a stroke of "good luck" that Achashverosh, as he was worrying about Haman, "found" the exact right story among thousands that would further Esther's tenuous plan. How much more "lucky" was it that, for his own reasons, Haman burst into the royal bedroom in an agitated state. The success of Esther's plan was dependent upon factors so remote from her control that they in fact did need an angel of Hashgacha to succeed. The angel is the hashgachic cause underlying the series of seemingly chance events that neatly allowed Esther's wisdom to prevail. It was therefore the angel, not Esther, who guided Achashverosh to see Haman for the dangerous tyrant that he really was.

Our conflict is now resolved. Once we realize the problem of the imprisoning distortions that form the prism through which we filter everyday life, the tension between midrash and prophetic texts is reconciled. The prophetic text focuses us upon accounts of everyday life in which hashgacha operates. The midrash shocks us out of our self-imposed filters such as overestimating beauty or the power of our own schemes in order to see specific instances of hashgacha in the Megilla.

PEDAGOGIC TOOLS

We are our children's first teachers of Torah, and our guidance and input remain of utmost importance, particularly while they are still in school. The following ideas are intended to assist you in using the "Next Generation Shiurim" in your family with the greatest degree of success.

BASIC PRINCIPLES

(See Applications section for the practical applications to this Shiur)

Enter the world of the child. What are his or her interests? Typically, most children are not naturally interested in Jewish learning. Therefore, it is up to the parent to create a motivational structure. But keep in mind that the specific form that this takes will of

necessity vary with the child's age and natural interests.

Rewards or "reinforcements" may be needed to help keep the child interested until he/she matures enough to be able to appreciate Torah learning 'lishmah'. For most students younger than 9th grade, candy or food works as a motivation for involvement with the shiur. Above 9th grade, small cash rewards, i.e., a quarter per good question, will help to grab the child's attention.

Ask open-ended questions that will elicit the child and help to find out about his world.

Whenever there is a conflict between written text and midrash, confront the child with this conflict in an age appropriate way. Try to elicit from the child what he/she thinks really happened.

Accept and encourage all questions from the child. No question should ever be out of bounds. If you feel that you cannot answer the question in an intellectually honest way, acknowledge the value of the question, admit that you need to think about it some more, and then seek assistance.

You may contact us with questions or comments via e-mail at torahacademyli@yahoo.com.

APPLICATIONS

One of the major points to discuss is the role of Hashgachas Hashem pointed to by the conflict between the presentation of events in the text of the Megillah and the differing presentations of these same events in the midrashim. By highlighting the contrast using these two midrashim, we learn an important lesson about the role of midrash in helping us to understand the Megillah. Below are just some suggested questions for discussion based directly on the shiur. Do not be afraid to develop your own in response to your child's needs and interests.

Guiding questions for discussion

Imagine that we could watch a video of the king's "beauty pageant" the way we watch the Academy Awards. What do you think Esther looked like? Do you think that she was the most beautiful girl in Shushan? Do you think she was green?

What does it tell us about Achashverosh that he wanted to choose a wife in this way?

Do you think Achashverosh would have been attracted to a "green" girl?

Compare and contrast the typical movie star relationships of today (Brad Pitt, Jennifer Aniston, and Angelina Jolie immediately spring to mind) to Achashverosh and Vashti, then to Achashverosh and Esther.

Did Esther's beauty alone save the Jewish people? Why or why not? Find support for your answer.

What do you think caused the king to "happen" to look in the Sefer Zichronos to the page about Mordechai saving his life? ■

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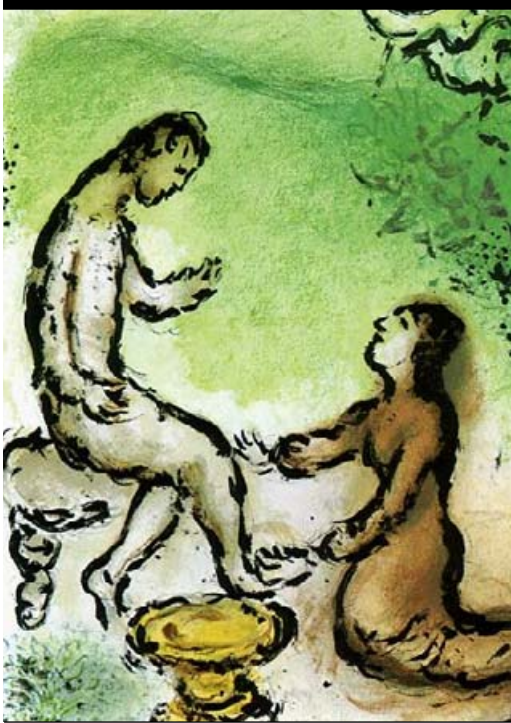
RABBI ISRAEL CHAIT

Written by student

Chapter 1, Mishna 6: "...Acquire for yourself a friend..."

Rabbeinu Yona, in explaining the language of 'acquire' with regards to a friend, cites an interesting verse from Proverbs: "One who covers an offense, seeks love, but one who harps on the matter alienates a ruler." (17:9) Rashi, in his commentary on the verse, explains that if one sins to another and doesn't tell him he sinned nor shows anger towards him, he will cause the sinner to love him. But if he holds on to the enmity and keeps reminding the sinner of the sin, then even close friends will separate from him. Rashi goes further by adding that the 'Ruler of Above' will separate from him since he violated the commandment of "You shall not take revenge nor bear a grudge" (Leviticus 19:18)

Rabbeinu Yona gives a different interpretation of



the verse. He says that the verse means that if a friend covers up another's sins, then the love between them will last because he tolerates the sins. However, if a friend says something bad about him and he tells others, "Look at what he said about me" then his friends will separate from him.

According to Rabbeinu Yona the verse is describing what we would call a petty relationship. People won't look past the fact that this person is making a mistake by telling others about another person. The correct perspective, as we mentioned previously, is that there is only one criterion for a friendship: whether it is beneficial. One should not get caught up in the petty emotions and mistake them for a person's essence. The essence of a person is deeper than that, so that if there is what to be gained, one should look past these smaller issues.

Rashi's explanation of the verse goes further by saying that the gossiper is bearing a grudge, using his friend's imperfections for his own advantage and not recognizing his own imperfections. This is against reality and so it is against God. Here again, man indulges his petty emotions, and misjudges man's essence.

With regards to the issue of revenge and bearing a grudge, there is an interesting Rambam that discusses these prohibitions. In his Laws of Traits (Chapter 7, law 7) the Rambam writes: "One who takes revenge has a bad trait for he should be a person who foregoes his own rights since they are just over matters of this world and those with proper understanding see that things of this world are worthless, so they won't have feelings for revenge." The Rambam is telling us that it is because people put a value on things in this world that causes them to feel that their happiness is being taken away when deprived of these things. In truth, what was taken away in this world was nothing, so one should not feel as if there was any harm done.

We may ask on the Rambam: what about the fact that the person tried to harm us? Doesn't that warrant some reaction? Furthermore, what if someone would take away time from learning that isn't just a matter of this world, so would revenge then be justified? It seems as if it would have been simpler for the Rambam to just say that there is nothing to gain by revenge, and that would have been the end of it.

The idea behind the Rambam's explanation goes deep into the mindset of how one relates to other people. We all realize that we are in need of various

goods from others, and so we need friends. As a result, we divide others into two groups - friends and enemies. Enemies get in the way of what is good for us so we try to get rid of them. This is where revenge comes from - this person tried to take away my goods so I need to destroy him in return. The Rambam is saying that a correct thinker understands that there is no need to make this division of friends and enemies because the real good is perfection, and that is a good, which is achieved, independent of others. Once one realizes that others cannot give him the real good, nor take it away, then one will be neutral to such situations. There should be no desire for revenge because one person can never truly harm another.

This idea can be seen in the story of Joseph and his brothers. After Jacob dies, Joseph tells the brothers that they should not worry that he would take revenge on them for what they did. He explains that all that occurred was from God and that God had prevented any harm from being done to him. With this response, Joseph was saying to his brothers that Divine Providence was the controlling factor in the situation and as a result there he harbored no personal feelings. He related to them without hatred for what they had tried to do, because he knew they could not benefit or harm him - only Divine Providence could. Therefore he would not retaliate against them.

Yet, the idea of the Rambam requires further clarification. If there is no reason for revenge in case of worldly matters, what about when one tries to take away your opportunity for the next world, the true good? For example, would one be justified in taking revenge on another who took away time from learning?

The issue here concerns how one relates to the true good. Most people redirect their materialistic emotions and attach them to Torah. They simply swap the object of their desires. They fail to understand that the object of their attachments can not be the only thing that is different - it must be a different relationship. If one learns so as to become a great Torah scholar then he is replacing money with Torah. When one is interested in a life of perfection, he isn't interested in any status. The Talmud, in Tractate Berachos, tells us of a discussion that took place when Rabbi Yochanon visited Rabbi Eliezer who was sick. Rabbi Eliezer was crying so Rabbi Yochanon asked him why he cried. He continued, "if because you didn't learn enough Torah, then that is not a problem for "whether one has a lot or a little, as long as his heart is towards heaven". At first glance, the consolation of Rabbi Yochanon seems difficult to understand: is he saying that how much one knows doesn't matter? There is a statement in the Jerusalem Talmud that says one word of Torah is worth as much as all the commandments! To be continued. ■

the Book of Job

RABBI ISRAEL CHAIT

Transcribed by students

PART V TZOFAR'S ARGUMENT

Tzofar is of the opinion that all of God's actions are due to His essence. Thus, the only understanding of His actions is by understanding His essence. Therefore, since man cannot understand God's essence, we cannot understand His actions. Tzofar argues that it is impossible to attain reasons for God's actions. (11:3) These are the words of Maimonides. But Tzofar's words do not seem to be what Maimonides says. If we review Tzofar in verses 13 through 20, he seems to be saying that there is a system of justice. So how can Maimonides hold the view that that we cannot understand God's actions, yet, we can understand His justice?

It is true that Tzofar says, "Who can know God?" But this is not particular to Tzofar. So why does Maimonides state what he did? Tzofar also states in verse 5 that God exacted less from Job than what he really deserved. In 4:17 we see that Eliphaz says the same thing as Tzofar. Furthermore, it seems as though Tzofar contradicts himself: first he says that God exacted less than he deserved, which means there is a system, and then he says that you cannot understand God, which would mean that even if there were a system, you could not fathom it.

In truth, there is no contradiction. For when Tzofar says there is a system, as in, "Job got less than he deserved" and verses 13-20, he means just that. And when he states that God is unknowable,

he means that God's system of justice is not based on man's idea of justice, but rather on God's system, which is part of His essence, and unknowable to man. Therefore, both are true: there can be a system, and also, it is unknowable. Tzofar is not suggesting a contradiction.

JOB'S RESPONSE TO TZOFAR

Chapter 12

Job straddles both sides of the argument regarding the existence of Specific Providence (Hashgacha Pratyos). Does this mean he is unsure? No it does not. What Job means with his apparent contradiction is that he cannot detect a system with which God works? And the reason that this is in his answer is that Tzofar said that there is in fact a system. Thereby, Job conveys to Tzofar, via example, how there really is no system, in his opinion. Job unmasks an inconsistency in the way of the world, if one attributes all situations to God.

In chapter 13:1-10, Job rebukes his three friends. Especially in verse 10 where he says:

"Will you secretly show partiality to God?"

Job is saying that the three have an emotional prejudice for God. He continues, "God will get you for your lies because God does not like lies in any form." In verse 13 Job states that he should be left alone so as to speak his mind, and let whatever come, be upon him. He says this because he

maintains it better to commit himself to what his knowledge tells him, than to openly deceive himself, like the three are doing. He maintains it is true that he may get punished for his opinion, but it would be much worse to openly fool himself. But in order for Job to hold this view, he must be premising that God favors truth, because that is what Job is committing himself to via this opinion.

We see from verses 15 and 16 that Job did not lose his love God. He says he will trust in God. On the whole, even though Job did not understand why these things were happening to him, he still loved the truth. Ironically, Job would be more in line with perfection by saying something, which may not be true. The reason why he would be more truthful, is because he was guided by reason. If he were to deny reason, that would surely be going against truth.

In verse 21 Job says that God should,

"draw His Hand far from me", and "let not thy terror make me afraid."

The "drawing of the hand" means "don't oppress me physically", while "Thy terror" means mentally. Job wished to be physically and mentally capable of arguing with God. Then, in verse 23, he says, "How many are mine iniquities and my sin." Job meant in other words, "God is doing this to me because of my sins, and if so, I want to know what exactly the sins are." Or God is doing this because He wants to destroy me, "Wherefore hidest Thou Thy face, and holdest me for Thine enemy?" (13:24) ■



QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

Magen David Sephardic Congregation
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Evolution & Intelligent Design

RABBI JOSHUA MAROOF

Question: What is the Jewish view of the theory of Evolution? Is it proper for a religious Jew to accept evolution, being that it contradicts the Biblical story of creation? Shouldn't we support the Intelligent Design approach instead?

Answer: There are multiple aspects to your question. First of all, let me emphasize that the Torah is not a science book. It is not designed to present us with a comprehensive account of physics, biology or chemistry. The primary objective of the Torah is to teach that the entire Universe is nothing but an expression of the Divine wisdom and that human beings have the unique capacity to comprehend at least some of that wisdom. These are theological principles that have no specific implications for scientific theory. In other words, we subscribe to the idea that Hashem created all that exists and that the material world operates in a lawful, harmonious manner that reflects His knowledge and providence. This general concept neither proves nor disproves any specific scientific hypothesis.

Many modern readers of the Bible are troubled by its apparent inconsistency with contemporary scientific knowledge. These readers have unfortunately been influenced by a fundamentalist approach to Biblical interpretation that is prevalent among Protestant Christians. This approach insists that the words of the Bible are meant to be taken at face value and leads to a wholesale rejection of the scientific method. By contrast, the Jewish view, as represented in the Talmud and in the writings of classic rabbinic thinkers such as Maimonides and Nachmanides, has always been that the first two chapters of the Book of Genesis are not to be taken literally. This assumption was part and parcel of Jewish thought long before anybody had an inkling that there might be 'contradictions' between the Torah and science.

The study of the Mystery of Creation has traditionally been reserved for a small elite group of accomplished scholars who are prepared to delve into its secret, metaphoric meaning. A simple literal reading does not do justice to the complexity or the depth of the Torah's presentation of Genesis. The value that we, the common people, draw from it is the knowledge that the Universe is God's creation - no more and no less.

Keeping in mind that the Torah doesn't mean to describe the process of Creation in a literal vein, there is nothing in the Torah that can be used to refute the theory of Evolution. Although the adoption of a completely materialistic, atheistic outlook on the world is often associated with evolutionary theory, this need not be the case. We can easily maintain that God created the Universe in such a way that its various components unfolded through a gradual process of evolution. Indeed, there is a magnificence and a beauty to the concept that God - with one, singular act of creation - set such an unimaginably complex chain of events in motion that culminated in the breathtakingly intricate world we see around us today.

At the same time, though, the Torah does not confirm Evolutionary theory. No scientific theory should attempt to claim Biblical endorsement because, as mentioned above, specific scientific principles cannot be derived from the Bible. Any scientific approach is acceptable to Judaism as long as it is based upon the fundamental assumption that the existence of matter and its lawfulness is the result of God's design, and provided that it is compatible with the idea that the human soul is not a purely physical entity. Beyond this, all scientific concepts are the result of fallible human thought and must necessarily be criticized and reevaluated regularly to ensure that they are not erroneous. A review of the history of scientific

thought confirms the importance of a constant process of critical review.

Finally, with regard to Intelligent Design: I do not see what the notion of Intelligent Design adds to scientific knowledge. It is a broad metaphysical or theological conviction, not a specific explanation of any phenomena in the physical world. Intelligent Design answers the question of "Who" rather than "How", placing it outside the realm of science. Indeed, it seems to involve an abdication of our responsibility to pursue true knowledge of God's creations because, instead of working to understand God's natural laws, proponents of Intelligent Design theory simply fall back on "it's the way it is because God made it that way." This belief does not bring us to a more complete appreciation of God's wisdom as revealed in nature.

As Maimonides teaches, the highest level of love of Hashem can only be attained when one perceives the profundity of Hashem's knowledge that is revealed in the abstract laws that govern the Universe. This requires us to seek the simplest, most elegant and most accurate account of the way in which our world operates and how it came to be. Honest scientific inquiry enables us to see how the infinite complexity and detail we encounter ultimately derive from One Source and the laws of physics He has established.

On the other hand, assuming that God needs to fashion or to guide each and every element of His Universe separately detracts from our sense of His grandeur and perfection. An artist who can produce a masterpiece with a thousand brushstrokes is no doubt inferior to an artist who can produce the same artwork with a single brushstroke. Thus, through attributing everything around them to miraculous Divine intervention, Intelligent Design theorists do not honor God, they underestimate Him.

In conclusion, there is no religious objection, from a Torah standpoint, to the theory of Evolution per se. We cannot confirm or deny the theory based upon the text of Genesis, which is understood in our tradition as an esoteric theological work, not a scientific treatise. In fact, the theory has many attributes that recommend it, even from a religious perspective - such as, for example, the elegance of its reduction of the complexity of our world to a simple, natural mechanism. All things considered, though, our belief in the Torah does not require us to embrace or to reject any particular scientific hypothesis. The Torah teaches us about the Source of the physical world and how we should relate to Him, but it stops short of providing us with a specific set of beliefs about how the world operates or how it came into existence. It is up to us as human beings to seek the answers to these questions to the extent of our ability. ■

Letters



Letters

from our

READERS



Letters

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The Dead Know Nothing II

Reader: You pointed out a Jewish fundamental, "it is not fitting to pray to any creation in the world and to request any assistance from it, except from God alone." You say this is a quote from "the Iyyun Tefila from the book Otsar Tefilos." My understanding is as follows:

The dead are CAPABLE of receiving information about worldly events from God, from other dead, and from the living. (The dead are NOT CAPABLE of receiving information about worldly events in any other manner.) However, it's not FITTING for the living to communicate information to the dead. Calev was a tribal prince, so we can reasonably expect he behaved in a fitting manner. Therefore, we can conclude that Calev did not pray (deliberately communicate information) to the dead.

Would you please comment on my understanding? Thank you. *-Beth*

Rabbi Moshe Ben-Chaim: "The dead know nothing" - a statement of King Solomon - is part of a few verses in Ecclesiastes IX, where King Solomon exposes the sentiments of those with false views, before correcting them with Torah truths.

King Solomon states in the previous verse that a living dog surpasses a dead lion. Of course a lion is more formidable than a dog, but King Solomon wishes to identify the false opinions of man, and then correct them with his own words. So, King Solomon first articulates "a living dog is better than a dead lion" (9:4) presenting man's false philosophy...but the falsehood must be analyzed.

I believe this fallacy to be man's overestimation of "life". Thus, even a measly dog that is alive, man falsely "assumes" to surpass a lion, since it is dead. But this is man's error, for man praises life as an "inherent good", a reaction generated from man's fear of death, and not derived from intelligent study. In fact, death cannot be evil, for God wills it to be so. In verse 9:2, King Solomon again describes this human error: "there is one event for the righteous and the wicked", referring to death. With this, King Solomon articulates not his own view, but that of ignorant men: "Regardless of my righteousness [man thinks] I will die, just like the wicked". With these words, man exposes his distorted barometer of human value. He means to say, "what good is righteousness, if I die like the wicked person?!" But this is an error, since the Torah teaches that "death" is no barometer of one's perfection, since "all" men die, even the righteous. Therefore, King Solomon teaches we must look past the reality of death, if we are to determine man's merit.

The King first exposes man's false sentiment, viewing righteousness as useless since "all" men die. We are then to realize this fallacy through the subsequent address of the King, as he urges man to live properly in the following verses. Why does the King urge this? It is because these acts he subsequently lists, are good acts, and are in fact the true barometer of perfection. Conversely, ignorant man assumes death as inherently evil, rendering worthless any good one performs in life. To correct this latter fallacy, the King first articulates the false view, and then follows with the true means of measuring one's perfection: good actions.

But I state all this to teach one simple point: the King is not contradicting ignorant man on every point. For King Solomon is firm: "the dead know nothing". He argues not on that, but whether this reality should be any barometer of man's perfection. The King openly accepts the dead as knowing nothing, and this is why he entertains the argument of the fools. He accepts the premise that the dead know nothing, because it is true. What is false is "how" man views this reality: is it any barometer of the deceased's perfection? The King says it is no barometer. But King Solomon could not make his argument, had he felt the dead are aware. For if the dead are aware of the living talking to them, then the entire statement would be false, and the King's response, baseless.

Thus, we conclude, King Solomon in fact said and meant, "the dead know nothing".

Based on this reasoning, I remain with this view, also shared by Otsar Tefilos, who never retracted it, regardless of who in the Talmud did retract their opinions. Maimonides also teaches that the Talmud is not the last word, if it violates reason. Maimonides himself argued on the Talmud and the words of certain Gaonim as being false:

Guide for the Perplexed

(Book III; chap. XVII)

"But they contain an additional doctrine which is not found in the Law; viz., the doctrine of "afflictions of love", as taught by some of our Sages. According to this doctrine it is possible that a person be afflicted without having previously committed any sin, in order that his future reward may be increased; a view which is held by the Mu'tazilites, but is not supported by any Scriptural text."

In summary, although the dead can be informed of matters via God, it does not appear to be true that living people might inform them. This makes sense, for talking to a corpse is like talking to a rock. The soul is not "in the grave". Man is then wrong to attempt such futility. ■

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