



What tragedy can occur when we engage emotions alone... especially the religious emotion? Read Haftoras Tzav.

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## IN THIS ISSUE

SHEMINI: MOURNING	I-3
FOLLOWING GOD	I,4
THE TORAH PERSONALITY	5-7
LETTERS	8

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## Weekly Parsha

# Shemini

RABBI BERNIE FOX

“And Ahron said to Moshe, “Today, they sacrificed their sin offering and their burnt offering before Hashem. And there occurred to me such. If I had

(continued on next page)

## Prophets

### HAFTORAS TZAV:

# Being Religious vs. Following God

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

As we continue in the book of Leviticus discussing sacrifice, last week's Haftoras Tzav (Jeremiah 7:21–8:3) records God's rejection of the Jews' sacrifices. God says He never asked for sacrifices from the time the Jews "left Egypt". He repeats this, so something about Egypt is vital to understanding the Haftora. Instead, God says, "All I commanded you is that you listen to My voice and I will be a God to you, and you will be to Me a nation, and you will walk in the entire path that I commanded you, in order that good befall you. But you did not listen and you did not incline your ear, but you went in your own counsels, and in the freedom of your evil heart...so you went backwards and not forwards." (ibid 7:23,24) Further (7:31) God rebukes the Jews for having sacrificed their children in fire to idolatry, performing acts "that I did not command, nor that entered My heart". Other than the obvious "sacrifice" parallel, what is the deeper connection between God's rebuke of their Temple sacrifices, and human sacrifice?

In our Torah, God clearly requests sacrifice. How then can the prophet say God never requested sacrifice from the time of Egypt"? The answer is that God means He never desired the "act" of sacrifice per se. As He said, "All I commanded you is that you listen to My voice..." The mention of Egypt is to hint to the source of man's corrupt sacrifices. (The Jews corrupt sacrifices contained a germ learned in Egypt.)

(continued on page 4)

(Shemini cont. from pg. 1)

## Weekly Parsha

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**eaten the sin offering today, would it be correct in His eyes?" (VaYikra 10:19)**

Our parasha begins with a discussion of the eighth day of the initiation of the Mishcan. On this day, Ahron and his sons began to serve in the Mishcan. Two of Ahron's sons – Nadav and Avihu presented an offering of incense that is not commanded by Hashem. The Almighty immediately punished them with death for presenting this unauthorized offering.

In response to this tragedy, Ahron did not eat the Kohen's portion of one of the sin offerings sacrificed on that day. From which sin offering did Ahron not eat? The eighth day of the initiation of the Mishcan occurred on the first day of the month of Nisan. Special offerings were offered because of the advent of the new month. One of these was a sin offering. This is the sacrifice from which Ahron did not eat.

Moshe criticized Ahron for this omission. He told Ahron that he should have eaten his portion of the sin offering. Ahron responded to Moshe. He told Moshe that he disagreed, and remained firm in his decision. He explained that his sons have just died. He concluded that it is not appropriate for him to eat the sacrifice.

What was the relationship between the death of Ahron's sons and eating the sin offering? Ahron was explaining that he was in a state of mourning – avelut. As a mourner – an avel – it was not appropriate for him to consume the sin offering for the new month.

Moshe accepted Ahron's explanation. He agreed that Ahron had acted properly.

Maimonides maintains that it is a Torah obligation to mourn the death of close relatives. What is the source for this mitzvah? Maimonides contends that the exchange between Moshe and Ahron is the basis for mitzvah of avelut. Ahron did not eat his portion of the sin offering because he was an avel. Moshe acknowledges the validity of Ahron's decision. This dialogue establishes a Torah level commandment of mourning for close relatives. Maimonides further explains that, according to the Torah, mourning takes place only on the day of death and burial. However, Moshe established an avelut period of seven days.[1]

We are obligated to display kindness and compassion to others. The obligation takes many forms. For example, we are obligated to visit the

sick. The Talmud explains that another expression of this obligation is visiting and comforting mourners.[2]

There is an interesting custom regarding the visiting of mourners. Some people do not visit or comfort the mourner during the first three days of the avelut. This custom is not universally observed. However, an analysis of this custom does provide an important insight into the concepts of mourning and consolation.

There is no direct source for this custom in the Talmud. However, one explanation offered for the custom is based upon the comments of the Talmud in Tractate Moed Katan. There, the Talmud discusses the avelut period. The Talmud distinguishes between the first three days of avelut and the remainder of the mourning period. The

Talmud explains that these first three days are devoted to crying. The mourner is to cry over the loss of the relative.[3],[4]

This explanation requires some elaboration. Visiting an avel is an act of compassion. An act of compassion is most meaningful when it is most needed. During the first three days of mourning, the avel weeps over the loss of the loved relative. It seems that this is the ideal time to visit and comfort the mourner. This is the period during which the avel is most in need of consolation. Why is the process of consolation restricted during this period?

There are two aspects to the process of avelut. Avelut is designed to help the survivors deal with and come to terms with their loss. Avelut is also a tribute to the departed – the niftar. The first three days of avelut are devoted to intense mourning – to weeping. Is this weeping designed to facilitate the healing of the avel or is the weeping an expression of honor for the departed?

One simple explanation is that the process of weeping is a tribute and honor to the departed. Through weeping, the mourners demonstrate their love for the niftar, the niftar's impact and importance. Without this process, the niftar would be reduced in significance.

Consolation is designed to diminish the sense of loss. It reduces the need to cry and weep. Therefore, attempts to comfort and console the avel are inappropriate during these three days devoted to weeping. If these attempts are effective, the avel's sense of loss will be diminished. With this curtailment of deep sorrow, the honor of the niftar is

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compromised. In order to encourage the proper tribute to the niftar, it is necessary to contain our compassion for the avel and restrain the urge to provide comfort and consolation.

There is another approach to explaining the custom of restricting efforts to console the avel during the first three days of avelut. Avelut is also a process of healing and closure. It is designed to serve the needs of the avel. True acts of compassion towards the avel must share this objective. True kindness helps the avel restore some level of personal tranquility and equilibrium. This concept has important implications in regard to comforting the mourner.

The first days of avelut are devoted to weeping. During this period, we care for the needs of the avel. We provide a peaceful environment in which the avel can come to terms with the loss. Do messages of comfort and consolation contribute or detract from this environment?

In order for an attempt at consolation to be effective, the avel must be receptive. During these first three days, attempts at consolation may be ineffective. Furthermore, these efforts can be callous and insensitive. During this period, the mourner experiences the greatest sense of loss. In truth, the mourner is inconsolable. Efforts to provide consolation are not effective. The mourner cannot relate to these well-intended

messages. The attempts at consolation may even be interpreted by the avel as a depreciation of the loss. An unintended message may be communicated. This unintentional message is that the depth of the avel's loss is not understood or appreciated. Therefore, rather than comforting the mourner, these messages disturb and isolate the mourner.

The Talmud Yerushalmi makes an amazing comment regarding these first three days of mourning. The Talmud comments that during these first three days, the soul of the niftar continually attempts to return to the body. After three days of frustration, the soul realizes that its material existence has ended. It will not return to the body. With this realization, the soul abandons any further attempts to regain its former material existence.[5]

These comments are difficult to understand. The soul is not material. It is not guided by the instinctual drives and material desires of the body. It is a completely spiritual entity. The material desires that we experience in this life are a result of the union of the soul with the physical body. Therefore, the comments of the Talmud Yerushalmi cannot be understood in a literal sense. It is inconsistent with our Sages' understanding of the soul. According to this understanding, the soul would not desire or seek to

return to the material world. What is the message of our Sages in their comments?

It seems that the Sages are not describing the actual activities of the soul. Instead, the Sages are providing an astute lesson regarding the experiences and perceptions of the mourner. Why does the avel experience such intense sorrow and pain during these first three days? The avel is confronted with a dichotomy. Death creates a sudden change in the mourner's reality. Yesterday, the niftar was a member of the avel's world. Today, the loved one is gone. This sudden transformation produces the dichotomy. The avel does not easily adapt to these changed circumstances. Instead, the mourner is confronted with a conflict. The avel is accustomed to a world that includes the niftar. Therefore, the avel continues to reach out to the loved one. At the same time, the mourner realizes on an intellectual level that the loved one has passed on. There is a dichotomy between the personal reality of the mourner and the avel's objective intellectual perception. The mourner's intense pain is a result of this conflict. After a period of time, the mourner grows more accustomed to the loss. The avel is resigned to the finality of death. At this point, the mourner is ready to deal with the tragedy and seek reconciliation with the new reality.

We can now understand the comments of the Talmud Yerushalmi. The Talmud is eloquently describing the experience of the mourner. The avel attempts to rejoin the soul of the departed with its former existence. The mourner is not yet accustomed to the tragic change of circumstances. However, each attempt is frustrated by the reality of death. This process continues until the avel finally is reconciled with the reality of the loss.

The comments of the Talmud Yerushalmi seem to support our second interpretation of the restriction upon consoling the avel during the first three days of mourning. These three days are characterized as a period of adjustment for the avel. The Talmud describes the depth of the mourner's despair and pain. It is quite understandable that attempts at consolation might be ineffective and even counterproductive during this period. ■

[1] Rabbaynu Moshe ben Maimon (Rambam / Maimonides) Mishne Torah, Hilchot Avel 1:1.

[2] Mesechet Sotah 14a.

[3] Mesechet Moed Katan 27b.

[4] See Rav Yekutiel Greenwald, Kol Bo Al Avelut, p 258 for a fuller discussion of the custom to restrict visiting the avel during the first three days of avelut and the sources for this custom.

[5] Talmud Yerushalmi, Mesechet Moed Katan 3:5.



(continued from page 1)

## Prophets

The first message is that just as was the case with those ancient Jews, our rote performances of mitzvah, token studying, and rushed-through prayers are meaningless to God.

In verse 26 God says that generation sunk to deeper levels of sin than those previous. It is evident that their empty religious practices cloaked their inner corruption, that made them sink so low. They duped themselves as truly righteous, since they performed the "acts" commanded by the Torah. But these actions were empty of God's true desire, that the Jews comprehend God, and His wisdom encased in the Torah's commands. They did not arrive at a subjugation to God, but they "went in their own counsels, and in the freedom of their evil heart".

That ancient generation felt securely "religious", as they witnessed themselves "doing mitzvahs". They thought "doing a mitzvah" was what God wanted...but God says the opposite. Those Jews possessed no true subjugation to the goal of mitzvahs. This being so, their emotions went unchecked.

To which emotion did they cater? Clearly, they succumbed to the "religious" emotion. They felt "sacrifice" was an ends in itself. Here is where they began to go backwards...

### How Emotions Work

When a human is not guided by reason, intellectual reflection, humble self-analysis and critique...all that directs his or her actions are emotions. It can be greed, ego, or any other. Those ancient Jews succumbed to the emotion of "sacrifice". And as is the case with all emotions, one seeks unrelenting satisfaction...emotions know no limitation, so it forces a person to the extreme in every case. Overeaters will gain hundreds of pounds. Anorexics will starve themselves. Drug addicts will kill themselves. And those immersed in the need to sacrifice, will seek better ways to show their 'loyal devotion' to their god. (I spell it with a lower case "g", since their god is false.) The true God stated that He does NOT desire sacrifice per se...exactly what these Jews offered.

### "I am Not Loyal Enough Yet"

So as the loyal sacrificing Jew slipped backwards, deeper into that emotion to sacrifice, he realized he wasn't "loyal enough" yet...unless he showed the highest degree of loyalty: sacrificing his child. This is what God depicts in this section of Jeremiah. Through the prophet, God teaches us where the emotion must lead us, since they have no limit. And in the emotion of loyalty,

one will eventually be forced to kill himself or others to show his loyalty.

The only limit that can be placed on an emotion comes from our intellect. For we have only two faculties. But if one is not intelligent in his religious practice, he too will go to extremes, as we see with Mother Teresa and Christianity itself, requiring one to be selfless. "Turn the other cheek" so an enemy can slap you again, says Christianity. "Drink any poison and Jesus can save you". Doing so, one actually feels deep satisfaction in their selflessness, being a true devotee to Jesus. Many people find satisfaction in martyrdom of this kind.

Today's Jews who deem their Rabbi as flawless are expressing this same emotion. They wish to be loyal to their Rebbe, so they don't think for themselves, and follow him blindly. But this was not the way of the true Torah scholars and righteous members of our people. Aaron disputed Moses on occasion, and Moses conceded. Aaron was correct to reject what his mind told him, and Moses was correct to accept error. Chullin 124a cites a case where one said he would not follow even Joshua, if he disagreed. These sentiments are true Torah values, as God does not wish we cave to emotions of any kind, including emotions to "serve", or emotions of loyalty. King Solomon taught in chapter three of Ecclesiastes that everything has its time...which means at times, any attitude is improper, such as love, war, mourning and dancing. Not one is the correct attitude 100% of the time.

Following the religious emotion, those Jews ended up killing their children. This seems far from what we could do, or even imagine. But if humans back then could commit such tragedies, we can today. We are no different. We share the identical, psychological design. A wise Rabbi once mentioned that it was the self-denial of one's own viciousness that caused the previous generation to deny Hitler could be doing what they heard. Had they admitted Hitler could be capable of genocide, they would have to accept that any person could...including themselves. That self-image was not something they could tolerate. And that denial delayed action...causing the murder of millions.

So we must be honest. We must be clear on exactly what God deemed the best life, and not deviate at all. We must not be impressed by the masses, assuming if "so many people do X, it must be right". For with that thinking, we should be Muslim, since greater numbers follow Islam. We must reflect and be sensitive to where we are following the religious Jewish crowd, instead of

God. God said these Jews erred since they did not follow Him, but rather, their fell prey to their free hearts. What is "following God"? It means exactly that: we do not follow any notion we sense in ourselves, but ALL our decisions and actions are based solely on His words. If we truly follow God, we will not offer sacrifice or prayer just so we might feel more religious. Our actions will not be the objective, but the goal will be an understanding and performance of all other laws.

God said we are to "walk in the entire path that I commanded you, in order that good befall you". So the litmus test of whether we follow God, is if we deem an act as insuring some good. This means, the acts that God desires must make sense to our minds as insuring some good. Deuteronomy 4:8 says that the other nations will be impressed with the Torah's wisdom.

As I write, I received an email from a religious Jewish group selling coins, with the promise that such coins will create some form of success. www.RabbiElimelech.com writes that purchasing these coins is "A great talisman [amulet] for success and redemption". This website denies the Torah fundamental of "Reward and Punishment". It means that if I am currently poor, and not deserving of God's graces, buying this coin will override God's will. And if I am righteous, but don't buy this coin, I will have less success. However, God taught otherwise, and did not make amulets mandatory. All that is needed is that we follow God, and He alone can provide. If we reject Him, no coin can help. In either case, these coins are useless, and deny God's words. One must be absent minded to fall for such a hoax.

Yet, this is all in the name of "religious Judaism". You see how far man can go, that today's Jews accept amulets, instead of God's word. Nowhere in all of Torah do we find Moses, the patriarchs or matriarchs practicing or condoning amulets of any sort whatsoever. Yet, Jews today buy into this coin charade. This is because Jews are not truly studying God's word, so their emotions get the better of them. Tzav's Haftora is right on the money.

Sadly, world Jewry is not ready for Moshiah who will be teaching Torah, not heathen superstitions [1]. The responsibility falls on the shoulders of today's educators and Rabbis to break their silence on this unpopular issue.

You chose Torah leadership. Teach it. ■

[1] Tosefta Sabbath, chap. 7.

# The Torah Personality: A Non-Believer

RABBI ISRAEL CHAIT

Joseph Campbell the famous mythologist tells of a meeting he once had with a priest while on vacation. The priest, recognizing the famous professor, asked Campbell if he believed in God, to which Campbell replied, "no." "Well, would you believe in Him if I could prove Him to you?" asked the priest. "Yes," replied Campbell, "but then how would I have faith?" The priest conceded defeat.

This anecdote typifies the idea of Christian faith. The virtue of faith is only possible where the mind does not convince us that something is so. Indeed, some have gone so far as to say that the ideal of Christian faith is to believe in something the mind dictates as absurd. As Tertullian said, "credo quia absurdum," (I believe that which is absurd). Soren Kierkegaard went even further and said that the very absurdity if the Christian claim makes it worthy of belief. This type of thinking has its source in the New Testament in 1 Corinthians 1 & 2.

There is nothing mysterious about why religion demands belief. Religion is not a result of knowledge and investigation. It is basically man's projections of an inner world onto what we call the real world. Such a system by definition demands belief. Its very existence is dependent on the denial of a weltanschauung that bases itself on reasoning alone. Such a system would spell doomsday for the religion. Other modes of cognition must be sanctified so that the religion may survive. These modes are dubbed "spiritual."

In order to protect itself further, religion maintains that these modes of cognition are superior to reason. The challenge of religion then becomes to rely exclusively on the "spiritual" type thinking. This becomes the mark of virtue, so much so that if one were to know something by reason there would be no religious challenge and hence no virtue. This was Campbell's response to the priest.

What does Torah have to say about this? Torah teaches the exact opposite of what all man-made religions teach. We usually characterize religious people as believers because they accept as true things which cannot be proven through reason. We call non-religious individuals non-believers because they demand proof for their convictions and therefore reject religious notions. In the eyes of the Torah both the religious and non-religious people are believers while the Torah personality is not a believer. Sound strange? Let us examine the matter more closely.

The Christian idea of faith leads to insoluble problems when we approach Torah. If having faith is the highest level of religiosity then Moses, the greatest figure in the Torah would be the least religious. Since he knew God via direct prophecy, "face to face," there would be no need for him to have any faith. He would thus be devoid of the most important religious virtue, faith. Similarly, the Patriarchs who had knowledge of God via prophecy would have no need for faith. Moreover, all Israel who witnessed God's revelation at Sinai would have no need for faith. The Torah then is a book of the faithless. Indeed, Torah encourages faithlessness. God tells Moses, "Behold I will come to you in the thickness of the cloud in order that the nation shall hear when I speak with you and in you too will they believe forever, (Exodus 19:9)." God expects the people to believe in Him and the fact that Moses is His loyal servant only after the spectacular event at Sinai. God never tells Moses to tell the people to simply have faith. Moses repeats the formula at great length in Deuteronomy 4:9-15, and 32-36, 5:2-5 and 19-24. It is quite clear through all of this that the only reason the people were expected to believe in God and Torah was because they witnessed the event at Sinai with their own eyes, as it stated, "You have been shown so that you may know that Hashem,

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He is God..., (Ibid. 4:35), "Face to face, God spoke to you, (Ibid. 5:4)", "You have seen that from the heavens I have spoken to you, (Exodus 20:19)." There is not one word in God's Torah that suggests that we suspend our critical faculty and indulge in what Christians call faith.

The Torah actually cautions against such a practice. In Deuteronomy 13, the Torah warns us not to follow any prophet who deviates from any of the teachings of the Torah even if his predictions of signs and wonders come true. Predictions, signs and wonders evoke the mysterious element in man's nature. The false prophet is a test (13:4) to see if man will remain faithful to the evidence of Sinai or follow the mysterious, the emotional and the faith type of thinking. We are never to be impressed by soothsayers, miracle workers, faith healers or other mystical performers. Throughout the Five Books of Moses and the prophets we find respect only for knowledge, wisdom, and understanding. The message of the Torah is a clear one: If

we are to perfect ourselves we are to pursue knowledge not any other modes of cognition. God's universe and God's Torah are based on knowledge. (See especially the first three chapters of Proverbs).

Only those who think of themselves as scholars but have never mastered the method of Torah analysis, and often times do not even know Hebrew, proclaim otherwise. Nahum M. Sarna in his book *Understanding Genesis*, states:

The quality of faith associated with Abraham at the covenant ceremony shows itself once again in this situation. Answering the doubts of his servant, the Patriarch is absolutely sure that the mission will be successfully accomplished. "The Lord, the God of heaven, who took me from my father's house and from the land of my birth, who promised me under oath, saying 'I will give this land to your offspring' - He will send his angel before you and you will get a wife for my son from there, (Genesis 24:7)."

Nahum M. Sarna, *Understanding Genesis*, (Schocken Books) 171.

Sarna then compares these words of Abraham with the words he used previously at the covenant of the parts, Genesis 15:2 and 15:8 stating:

At the outset of his career his very first words to God were expressions of doubt about each of the two elements of the divine promise - posterity and land. "O Lord God, what can you give seeing that I die childless..., (Genesis 15:2)," he had said despairingly of the former; and, "O Lord God, how (sic) shall I know that I am to possess it?" (Ibid. 15:8) was his response to the latter. Now he evokes both posterity and land, serenely confident that God's promises will work themselves out in history. Abram, the doubter has become Abraham, the man of absolute faith.

Ibid. Sarna's claim that Abraham was "absolutely sure that the mission will be successfully accomplished" is patently false. Had Sarna simply read the very next verse he would have realized this. Genesis 24:8 states, "And if the woman be not willing to follow thee then thou shalt be clear from this my oath." It is clear from 24:8 that Abraham was not sure at all that God would fulfill his mission. Sarna made a mistake in his translation verse 7. In Hebrew the future tense often signifies a hope or desire. the correct translation for the Hebrew word *yishlach* in this instance is not will send but shall send meaning should send. The same is true of Genesis 49:10. The translation should read "The scepter shall not depart from Judah," meaning should not depart, not will not depart. People in Israel often say *Hashem ya'azor*, meaning (I hope that) God shall help, not God will help. Abraham was not a man of naive religious faith who assumed that God will do as he wishes. He knew full well that neither he nor any other human being has knowledge of God's will. He thus prepared his servant for both eventualities.

Being raised in a Christian environment Sarna equated faith with religious virtue, he then proceeded to project this notion onto the Torah. He committed the error of a bad historian. He took something from his existing environment and projected it onto the past. Sarna's idea that Abraham doubted God at the covenant of Genesis 15 is not only wrong it is stupid. How can one speak to God, know that He is creator of heaven and earth and yet not think He can give him a son or give a certain land to a certain people? He is, however, consistent. He demonstrates as much understanding of Genesis 15 as he does of Genesis 24. (Genesis 15 contains a very profound concept which I cannot expound upon here). Unfortunately, due to the fact that most people are ignorant, men like Sarna can masquerade as scholars when they don't even know the most basic and fundamental principles of

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Torah. One must be extremely cautious about one's authorities these days.

It should be pointed out that the word *emunah* translated as belief or faith does not connote in Hebrew what these terms mean in English. The word *emunah* means verification of a truth from an external source, (see Genesis 42:20 and Exodus 14:31). It does not mean blind religious faith.

The Torah personality is guided by the *tzellem elokim*, the divine element in man's soul. All Torah authorities interpret that term as the rational element in man's soul. He bases his life on his knowledge of Torah and the demonstration at Sinai. (For an understanding of how the demonstration at Sinai is relevant today you may send for a special paper I have written on the subject). His belief in God is based on knowledge not shallow faith. As Maimonides states in the very beginning of his work, "the foundation of foundations and the pillar of all knowledge is to know that God exists." One must search assiduously for the knowledge of God's existence through the study of Torah.

The Torah personality is an individual committed to a way of life based on knowledge. For decisions in religious matters he studies the Talmud. He uses only intellect in interpreting its words. No Talmudic authority has ever based a ruling on feeling or religious emotion. Only logic and reason are admissible in this endeavor. What is contrary to logic is false.

But what of modern man is he a believer or a non-believer? Every person must have some philosophy of life. Every person strives for happiness and acts in a way he thinks is good. Modern man is ruled by one notion - success. He is convinced that fame, fortune and satisfaction of his desire for romantic love will bring him happiness. But does modern man know this to be true? Can he prove this? Indeed if we were guided merely by what we observe of others' lives it would be patently clear that such is not the case. Again and again people find to their dismay that those people who have what they dream of are in the depths of misery and despair. But modern man does not change his course. He persists in believing that in his case it would be different. He is a believer. He believes his emotions. Torah teaches us not to trust our emotions, to reason about what is truly good for man and to understand the nature of our emotions and instinctual life. Only through knowledge can we have a good and happy life. The Torah personality is a total non-believer in the

benefits most people ascribe to wealth, fame or romantic love. Maimonides states that the true Torah personality does not get excited by a sudden increase in his possessions or renown nor does he get depressed by a decrease in his wealth or popularity. He rides an "even keel" through life having the true good, Torah knowledge before his mind's eye always and everything else in proper perspective. His emotional life is tempered by knowledge. He is very critical in his judgments and goes through a lengthy analysis of himself and Torah before making any decisions.

Thus, based on our original definition of a believer as he who accepts conclusions uncritically and a non-believer as he who is guided by his mind we must conclude that the Torah personality is a non-believer while modern non-religious man is a believer par excellence.

Modern religious man who subscribes to the man-made religions, attempts to escape the human dilemma by creating in his mind a world based on simplistic infantile notions which have no support from reality. If only I could believe these things life would be great, he thinks. Belief becomes his great challenge. For the Torah personality perfection is the challenge. But even witnessing the event at Sinai does not give man perfection as is clear from the Torah narrative. Knowledge of God's existence through Sinai is only the beginning. Perfection involves the study and understanding of Torah ideas. We must gain knowledge of what is good and what is evil. We

must understand our every emotion. We must recognize the difference between our instinctual nature and our divine element. We must exercise careful judgment in our deeds to make certain that we are not being guided in our lives by our basic emotion. Like a great general, the Torah personality assesses his own strengths and weaknesses, knows when to move into battle and when to avoid certain situations. He knows when and when not to satisfy his instinctual nature. His every move is determined by knowledge. He knows that even the most righteous occasionally fail. He is always ready to reanalyze and reevaluate his past deeds. He learns from his errors and thereby rises to even greater heights. His is not an infantile simplistic challenge of faith, but the challenge of challenges - the challenge of human perfection. He is armed with a great work, the work that gives man true insight into the greatness and the frailties of human nature. He is constantly engaged in the delights of this insightful work, the great joy its knowledge brings, as well as the unique existence it forges for him. The Torah personality is never bored. He is interested in all of God's knowledge, from the most obscure minutiae of Halachic detail to the latest advance in scientific knowledge. In all this he sees God's infinite wisdom. He is best described as the prophet describes him, "And let us know, let us run (eagerly strive) to know God, (Hosea 6:3)." Ibn Ezra states on this verse, "We should eagerly strive to know God because this is the foundation of all knowledge and because of this alone man was created." ■

**MESORA**

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## Letters

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## Shabbat Shalom

**GM:** We have non-practicing relatives that sometimes visit us on Shabbat. They stay overnight on Friday and at times they cook meals (breakfast or something for lunch) on Shabbat day as well, as well as other activities not allowed. I don't know if I am blowing this out of proportion, but is this something we should allow to take place in our home during Shabbat or should we say something?

I feel it sends mixed signals to the kids and I personally don't feel comfortable. I have been told there are people that know way more than I do, and they allow their non-practicing relatives to do similar things at their homes during Shabbat.

What are your thoughts on the subject?

**Mesora:** I would express to them as you did to me that it is uncomfortable, and that it confuses your kids' perception of right and wrong. Tell them that you prefer they do not violate shabbos in your home. ■

## 1 God / 1 Judaism

**Joshua:** When you say that Orthodox Judaism is the only true form of Judaism, what form are you talking about: Modern Orthodox, Haredi, or Hasidic?

Thank You in advance,  
*Joshua*

**Mesora:** I refer to the Shulchan Aruch and the philosophy written in the Torah according to Rishonim. ■

## Seeing Stars

**Reader:** I am writing in reference to Volume VII, No.8 Dec. 14, 2007 where your JewishTimes cover page pictured a man's face superimposed on a field of stars. Subsequently, you posted a correction sent in by your friend Naomi saying "...images of stars should not be reproduced even in two-dimensions. This is based on idolatrous prohibitions." It is this comment from Naomi and your acceptance of it that I would like to question.

Rambam's Mishnah Torah, Hilchot Avodat Kochavim 3:11 says "...it is forbidden to make an image of the sun, the moon, the stars..." Moznaim's edition (translation by Rabbi Eliyahu Touger) has this footnote: "Our understanding of the Rambam's statement here can be enhanced by referring to his commentary on the Mishnah, Avodah Zarah 3:3: "This does not mean a sphere which represents the sun or the hemisphere which represents the moon, but rather the images which the astrologers [i.e., those following Greek mythology] attribute to the

stars,... e.g., Saturn is represented as an old dark man of venerable age; Venus is represented as a beautiful maiden adorned with gold; and the sun is represented as a king with a diadem sitting in a chariot. [These are forbidden because] they are falsehoods and the nature of falsehood is that it will surely spread."

Rav Kapach supports this interpretation by quoting BeMidbar Rabbah 2:6 which describes the pennant of the tribe of Issachar as having a picture of the sun and the moon. Were these images forbidden, it would be unlikely that Moshe would have told the tribe to depict them. Even if the decree was instituted in the later generations, it is not probable that the Rabbis would forbid images that had previously been used for Torah purpose.

The Ramah (Yorah De'ah 141:3) quotes the Rambam's opinion. The Turei Zahav 141:13 and Siftei Cohen 141:8, however, note that the Rambam's statement which were quoted above (and the Ramah's statements) refer to a question whether one is allowed to keep images of the sun or moon that he finds. Here, the question is whether one is allowed to make such images oneself. From the discussion of the question in Avodah Zarah 43B, where the Sages question how Rabban Gamliel possessed forms of the moon, it would appear that there is a prohibition against forms of the moon themselves.

This interpretation, however, is also somewhat problematic, because the Rambam writes that there is no prohibition against making images of animals. For example one of the Zodiac constellations is a fish and Gitten 36a describes Rav as making a drawing of a fish. Another is a lion, which is one of the most popular images found in Jewish art. I would have to agree with Rav Kapach, Moshe Rabbeinu would never have allowed any idol image to be used by the tribes on their pennants.

With Love of Klal Yisrael, Shalom  
*Menachem AviChayil Bahir*

**Mesora:** I disagree with your statement regarding Rabbinical prohibition of images previously permitted. God ultimately prohibited monuments once idolaters used them for corrupt purposes, although Jacob originally created them for God. And you must distinguish between creating images of fish, as opposed to images of the fish constellation Pisces. Those are two divergent drawings, as they differ in intent, although they might look identical. We must also distinguish between drawings made for purposes of Jewish law as with Rabban Gamliel...in contrast to those drawn for idolatrous purposes. In the end, we follow the Shulchan Aruch. See Shulchan Aruch Yoreh Deah II; siman 141 and the Sifsay Cohane note 8. Read it all, he brings good points to prohibit the actual sun sphere and bow-shaped moon images. ■