

WAS IT PROVEN THAT G-D DOESN'T EXIST?

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Shemos

When Moshe first appears before Pharaoh in this parashah, Pharaoh asks him, "Who is Hashem that I should listen to Him?" The prophet Yechezkel further tells us (Yechezkel 29:3) that Pharaoh used to say, "The Nile is mine, and I created myself." How does a person become so arrogant? Can anyone really believe that he created himself?

R' Shalom Mordechai Schwadron z"l (the "Yerushalmi Maggid" - see page 4) explains, quoting R' Saadiah Gaon z"l, that denial of G-d stems from throwing off the yoke of G-d. One who is depraved is not so because he does not believe in G-d; rather, he chooses not to believe in G-d because that denial frees him to be depraved. After all, how can any thinking person deny G-d's existence? Has anyone made a thorough scientific inquiry to prove that G-d does not exist?

This idea is found in Tehilim (14:1), writes R' Schwadron. There we read, "The depraved one says in his heart, 'There is no G-d'." This means: The person who is already depraved says "There is no G-d."

Chazal interpret the first part of this verse, "The depraved one says in his heart," to mean, "The wicked are controlled by their hearts." The desires buried in their hearts control their every move. For example, there was no one in history who performed the mitzvah of honoring his father better than did Esav, yet after Yitzchak blessed Yaakov instead of Esav, the latter said (Bereishit 27:41), "May the days of mourning for my father draw near, and I will kill my brother Yaakov." Esav, who honored his

father so perfectly, actually hoped for the death of his father, and all for material gain. Significantly, that verse in Bereishit opens, "And Esav said *_in_his_heart_*." Like all depraved people, he was controlled by the desires in his heart. (Ma'amar Avdei Ha'lev Ve'adonav printed in Da'at Torah, Orach Chaim Vol I.)

"He said to his daughters, 'Then where is he? . . . Summon him and let him eat bread'." (2:20)

The gemara (Sanhedrin 103b) teaches as follows: "R' Yochanan said in the name of R' Yose ben Kisma: 'The mitzvah of feeding guests is so great that it distanced two families from the Jewish people [i.e., the nations of Amon and Moav, who refused to feed the Jews when they sojourned in the desert].' R' Yochanan himself said: 'It distances those who are close; brings close those who are distant; causes G-d to ignore the evil of the wicked; enables false prophets to experience true prophecy; and one who neglects it is considered like an intentional sinner'."

R' Eliyahu Lopian z"l (see page 4) observes that the nations of Amon and Moav began their history very close to the Jews, not only geographically, but because their founders were nephews of our Patriarch Avraham. Nevertheless, the bad trait which Amon and Moav demonstrated by refusing to feed the Jews near the end of their 40 years in the desert caused the Torah to prohibit the men of those nations to marry Jews (even if the men convert to Judaism). There simply is no place for such traits among the Jews. (This is the meaning of, "It distances those who are close.")

On the other hand, the nation of Midian was situated farther from Eretz Yisrael, but the descendants of Yitro the Midianite sat on the sanhedrin/high court. Why? All because Yitro fed Moshe Rabbenu, as described in the above verse. (This is the meaning of, "It brings close those who are distant.")

When the wicked feed guests, Hashem ignores their wickedness and defers their punishment. For example, there was a man named Michah [not the prophet Michah] who openly carried an idol with him across the Yam Suf/Red Sea and who later established a temple to idolatry in Eretz Yisrael. Imagine the wickedness of this man! says R' Lopian. He witnessed the awesome miracles of the splitting of the Yam Suf, and yet he enticed others to practice idolatry! [Ed. Note: See page 1.] Why, therefore, asks the gemara, is Michah not listed among those who have no portion in the World to Come? Because his temple was situated at a crossroads where many hungry travelers passed, and he fed them.

Similarly we find that Hashem rewarded a false prophet with true prophecy because of his hospitality. How hard did the prophets work on their characters to achieve prophecy, and to this false prophet it came without preparation! Such is the power of feeding guests!

(Lev Eliyahu)

"It was on the way, in the hotel, that Hashem encountered him and sought to kill him." (4:24)

Just one verse earlier, Hashem told Moshe that he was to tell Pharaoh, "Behold! I shall kill your firstborn," and here Hashem is ready to kill Moshe himself because he delayed **a few minutes** in circumcising his son! How could two crimes that are so different both incur the death penalty?

R' Leib Chasman z"l (see page 4) explains that this is an example of how stringently Hashem judges the righteous. For the smallest infraction, even one barely discernible to ordinary men, a tzaddik incurs the death penalty. Why? Because, as Rashi writes in his commentary to Bereshit 1:1, ideally Hashem would operate the world with strict justice. Only because man could never exist that way did Hashem introduce the concept of mercy. Tzaddikim, however, are judged very strictly; in the long run, this is for their benefit, as it entitles them to greater reward as well.

(Ohr Yahel Vol. II)

An Astonishing Midrash

"Send through whomever You will send" (4:13) - this refers to Rabbi Akiva.

R' Yitzchak Schwadron z"l (see page 4) explains as follows: Chazal teach that Hashem created 50 levels of wisdom and Moshe achieved 49 of them in his lifetime. The sage Rabbi Akiva, however, reached higher; he achieved the 50th level.

How is this possible? Because after Moshe's death, Moshe, too, achieved the 50th level. Since we are all students of Moshe, we can now go where he has gone, even to the level which he did not achieve in his lifetime.

Chazal also teach that Hashem rushed the redemption before the Jews descended to the 50th level of impurity. Moshe, who did not reach the 50th positive level, would not have been able to take the Jews from the 50th negative level.

But, said Moshe, Rabbi Akiva will reach the 50th level! Use him as Your messenger!

(Mat'amei Yitzchak)

"Now you will see what I will do to Pharaoh" (6:1) - Hashem said to Moshe, "I have written in My Torah that you are humble - and now you question Me? You should know (in the words of Kohelet 7:8), 'The end of a thing is good from its beginning'."

R' Shalom Mordechai Hakohen Schwadron z"l (the elder - see page 4) explains: Hashem's statement, "Now you will see," was in response to Moshe's question (Shemot 5:23), "From the time I came to to Pharaoh to speak in Your Name, he did evil to this people." Moshe wanted to know why Bnei Yisrael's lot had gotten worse, instead of getting better. Hashem answered Moshe as follows:

It is written in the Torah (Bereishit 1:26), "Elokim said, 'Let us make man in Our image . . .'" Why does Hashem speak in the plural form in that verse? Chazal give two answers: First, Hashem wishes to imply that He consulted advisors. This teaches humility, i.e., it teaches that even the wisest person should consult advisors. Second, G-d has written the Torah in such a way that those who want to misunderstand it can do so. [Ed. Note: See page 1.] This is one of the verses that Hashem placed in the Torah for sinners to stumble over; specifically, one can conclude from this verse that there is more than one god.

In Pharaoh's time, there was a prevalent belief that good and evil were carried out by different gods. To Pharaoh, it might have appeared at the end of our parashah that the good god wanted to take the Jews out of Egypt, but that the evil god prevailed and allowed Pharaoh to further subjugate the Jews. Of course, Moshe knew that this was not true; he knew that there is only one G-d. Indeed, Moshe learned the other lesson from the verse, "Let us make man," for Moshe became the humblest of all men. As Hashem says to Moshe in the midrash, "I have written in My Torah that you are humble."

How then are we to understand the fact that the same G-d does good and bad? The midrash answers, "The end of a thing is good from its beginning" - in the long run it becomes apparent that nothing that Hashem does is bad. (Techelet Mordechai)

R' Shalom Mordechai Hakohen Schwadron z"l
("The Maggid of Yerushalayim")

born 5673 (1913) - died 22 Kislev 5758 (December 21, 1997)

This week marks the shloshim of R' Schwadron, one of Israel's senior Torah leaders, who was well known to the English-speaking public through Artscroll's The Maggid Speaks series.

R' Schwadron was born in Yerushalayim. His father, R' Yitzchak, was a noted scholar, and his grandfather, after whom he was named, was the leading posek/halachic authority in Galicia before World War I. The future maggid/preacher lost his father at age seven, and for a time lived in an

orphanage. After his bar mitzvah he studied in the Lomzer Yeshiva in Petach Tikvah, and later in the Chevron Yeshiva in Yerushalayim. In the latter school he came under the influence of R' Yehuda Leib Chasman, whose mussar/ethical discourses he later edited for publication. R' Schwadron also was responsible for the publication of Lev Eliyahu by R' Elya Lopian. (Through R' Chasman and R' Lopian, R' Schwadron was a third generation student of R' Yisrael Salanter.)

After his marriage to Leah Auerbach (sister of R' Shlomo Zalman Auerbach), R' Schwadron continued his studies in Kollel Ohel Torah led by Chief Rabbi Yitzchak Isaac Halevi Herzog. The kollel's members included R' Yosef Shalom Elyashiv and R' Shmuel Wosner, who today are among the world's leading poskim. Thereafter, R' Schwadron began his own teaching career, holding a number of positions during his long lifetime.

R' Schwadron was best known, however, for his career as a maggid and for editing and publishing approximately 25 of his grandfather's works. As a maggid, R' Schwadron traveled throughout Israel, Europe and the U.S., exhorting his listeners through stories and parables to improve their service of Hashem. (As noted, many of his thoughts are recorded in the The Maggid Speaks series by R' Paysach Krohn.) Many of R' Schwadron's trips abroad were as a fundraiser on behalf of Chinuch Atzmai, a chain of religious primary schools in Israel.

The elder R' Shalom Mordechai Hakohen Schwadron, who died in 1911, left behind dozens of halachic manuscripts, and his grandson, our subject, prepared these for publication. Among the important halachic works which the younger R' Schwadron published were She'eilot U'teshuvot Maharsham and Da'at Torah. (The latter is a work similar to the Mishnah Berurah, though less comprehensive.) Throughout his grandfather's works which he published, R' Schwadron graced many pages with his own notes and halachic opinions. In addition, some volumes are prefaced by mussar discourses written by the younger R' Schwadron. (Source: Encyclopedia Le'chachmei Galicia, p.13; Yated Ne'eman, 27 Kislev 5758; The Maggid Speaks)

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The editors hope these brief 'snippets' will engender further study and discussion of Torah topics ("lehagdil Torah u'leha'adirah"), and your letters are appreciated. Web archives at [Project Genesis](#) start with 5758 (1997) and may be retrieved from the [Hamaayan](#) page. Text archives from 1990 through the present may be retrieved from <http://www.acoast.com/~sehc/hamaayan/>. Donations to HaMaayan are tax-deductible.
