



This issue of Torat Chayim is dedicated to the soldiers of the IDF, the hostages, and the wounded.

Ramban on Our Parshah: Playing G-d or Serving G-d?

Every few years, new technologies resurrect a familiar question: Are we allowed to “play G-d?” The challenge has been applied to IVF, genetic screening, and cloning, to name a few arenas.

Fans of human innovation quote the Maharal of Prague, who described human endeavor as part of Hashem’s Creation: “Just as Nature operates at Divine decree, and Nature functioned during the six days of Creation as is appropriate for Nature, the same applies to the actions of a person, with his brain which is above Nature and with his deeds which are not of Nature.” (*Be’er HaGolah* 2:10) They suggest that Hashem *wants* us to create, as per Rabbi Yosef Dov Soloveitchik’s observation regarding Bereishit: “If the Torah then chose to relate to man the tale of creation, we may clearly derive one law from this manner of procedure – viz, that man is obligated to engage in creation and the renewal of the cosmos.” (*Halakhic Man* pp. 100-101, Kaplan ed.)

On the other hand, former Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi Yisrael Meir Lau opposed cloning in 2003. He argued, “The moment medical science tries to take upon itself duties and areas which are not its responsibility - such as shortening life, cloning or creating life in an unnatural way - we must set down borders in order not to harm the Jewish basic belief that there is a creator of the universe in whose hands life and death are placed.”

Ramban is often quoted as opposing technological innovation. When our parshah prohibits crossbreeding species (*Vayikra* 19:19), Ramban comments, “Hashem created the world’s species, all of the living plants and mobile creatures, and gave them the power of reproduction... And He empowered them to reproduce according to their kind, never changing, as the Torah says ‘according to their kind’ in Bereishit 1... One who crossbreeds species alters and contradicts Creation, as though thinking that Hashem did not complete His world as needed, and therefore desiring to aid Creation, adding creatures.”

However, Rabbi Dr. Fred Rosner points to Ramban’s comment to Bereishit 1:28, that Hashem “gave humanity power and control of the land, to act on their will with animals, crawling creatures and all that slithers in the dust, and to build, uproot, and mine copper from the ground, etc.” He sees this as declaring that the world was given to us to use creatively, for therapeutic purposes. In his eyes, Ramban opposes attempts to **coopt** the power of Creation, but pursuits which seek to **further** Hashem’s goals via technology are praiseworthy. (*The Case for Genetic Engineering*, Torah uMadda Journal #9, 2000)

I’m not sure which read of Ramban is correct; what do you think?

Parshah Riddles for Kids (answers on the back)

Age 4-8: How old must a tree be before we may eat its fruit? A) 8 days, B) 3 years, or C) Bat Mitzvah

Age 8-12: The Torah says to stand when we see people who are A) old, B) wealthy, or C) humble?

Age 12+: The Torah prohibits verbal abuse. What example of verbal abuse does Rashi bring?

Journey Through Tanach: Shoftim Perek 2

Chapter 2 begins with a visit to the Jews by a “*malach*”. The *malach* goes to Gilgal, initial home of the *ohel moed* and a place of great spiritual heights in Yehoshua’s time. He rebukes the Jews for failing to uproot the wicked Canaanite society. (2:1-5) Midrashim and traditional commentaries identify this visitor as Pinchas, but Abarbanel contends that it was a different, anonymous prophet. The people weep.

This rebuke may have taken place as much as a century after the death of Yehoshua. The text then recounts Yehoshua’s last years and the aftermath of his passing. *Shoftim* 2:6-10 describes the rise of a new generation which was “unaware of Hashem and of the deeds Hashem had performed for Israel.” This highlights the challenge of Jewish history: Will new generations, with new experiences, make righteous decisions based on the Torah conveyed to them?

But Ralbag was puzzled by this generation’s ignorance of Hashem’s miracles; according to his chronology, Yehoshua and the elders led the Jews for only 27 years after en-

tering Israel. Could all of the witnesses of the Exodus have disappeared? Ralbag wrote, “Doubtless, many people were octogenarians and older, but because they were not *chachamim* (sages), all of Hashem’s actions did not enable them to save Israel from doing that which was evil in Hashem’s eyes.” (Commentary to *Shoftim* 2:10)

Rabbi Moshe Goldberg zt”l explained Ralbag’s point by citing *Tehillim* 107:43, “Who is a *chacham* who will guard these things, contemplating the kindnesses of Hashem?” He wrote, “The level of a *chacham* is that when he sees great miracles, he guards all that he knows, all of the ways he has been energized by these miracles, in his heart. Otherwise, one could see and hear of great things and remain as he was.” (*Bikkurei Moshe* 2, pg. 522)

The chapter concludes (2:11-23) with an overview of a cycle which will appear repeatedly in *Shoftim*, in which the Jews sin, Hashem allows other nations to oppress us, we are rescued by a *Shofeit*, we achieve a level of righteousness, and then we return to sin. Versions of the cycle recur until the time of Shemuel.

The 613 Mitzvot: #30 - Making Religion (Too) Personal

The Torah uses anthropomorphic language to portray Divine actions and moods, and Judaism encourages us to develop an emotional relationship with Hashem. One benefit of this approach is that it lays the groundwork for a sense of personal investment in our mitzvot. These activities are more than dry ritual or supernatural currency, they are demonstrations of love and loyalty. However, adding an emotional facet to our relationship with Hashem also risks drawing us into treating Hashem with less than total respect, contending that Hashem will lovingly overlook our wrongs. (Bava Kama 50a)

Shemot 20:7 combats this concern by building a barrier to prevent overfamiliarity, instructing us, “Do not take the Name of Hashem, your Master, for naught.” We may not invoke Hashem’s Name for a false or vain oath; Sefer HaChinuch counts this as the Torah’s 30th mitzvah.

The term “vain oath” includes taking oaths affirming well-known facts, or swearing to perform impossible acts. The issue is not falsehood; the problem is that taking such an oath demonstrates a lack of respect for the Name of Hashem, and therefore for Hashem directly.

Israel’s Chief Rabbis: The Shemithah Time-Out, Rav Avraham Y. Kook

Rav Avraham Yitzchak HaKohen Kook was born in Latvia in 1865. He learned in the Volozhin Yeshiva and was close with the Rosh Yeshiva, Rabbi Naftali Zvi Yehuda Berlin (Netziv). As a young man, Rav Kook served as Rabbi in Zaumel and then Bausk. In 1904 Rav Kook moved to Israel and became Chief Rabbi of Jaffa. He was in Europe during World War I; soon after returning home, he was appointed as the first Chief Rabbi of “Palestine”. He served in that role until his passing in 1935.

Rav Kook was heavily involved in the agricultural mitzvot of Eretz Yisrael. In 1910 he published *Shabbat Ha’Aretz*, a technical halachic work on the laws of Shemithah. In its preface he explained the spiritual significance of having a “sabbatical” year; this is an excerpt from that introduction:

That which Shabbat accomplishes for each individual, Shemithah accomplishes for the nation as a whole. This nation, with her Divine character implanted in her in a visible and eternal way, has a unique need for her Divine light

to be revealed in her, in its full radiance, from time to time, such that it will not be eradicated by mundane communal existence, with its work and worry, anger and competition, so that the purity of her soul in its entirety will be revealed as it is.

And when that brutality which must accompany the structure of on-going communal life reduces the gentle character of ethical life, and the ongoing conflict between the ideal [experience of] listening, and the [ideal] proclamation of generosity and truth, compassion and mercy [on one hand], and [on the other hand] the act of approaching and coercing and pressing for acquisition and property which must be manifest in the practical world, [this conflict] causes distancing of the Divine light from the nation’s communal consciousness... Then halting the social order in specific ways, from time to time, will bring this nation – when it is established on its foundation – to powerful elevation to the heights of the inner traits of ethical, spiritual life...

Upcoming Learning!

All classes are open to men and women and free of charge, unless otherwise noted

7:30 PM Shabbat May 11

The Kashrut of “Clean Meat” Part 2, with Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner, at Eitz Chayim

8:30 AM to 9:15 AM Sunday May 12

Fourteen Centuries: Rav Hai Gaon, with Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner, in the lobby at Eitz Chayim

Monday night Halachah in Healthcare Settings does not meet this week

7:15 PM Monday May 13: Tekes Ma’avar for Yom haZikaron and Yom ha’Atzmaut

7:15 PM Learning for Children and Adults in memory of IDF soldiers: Our Relationship with Eretz Yisrael

7:50 PM Minchah and Memorial Kel Malei for Yom haZikaron

Festive Maariv in honor of Yom ha’Atzmaut, and Israeli Refreshments!

Free of charge; RSVP at <http://tiny.cc/yh84> to help us plan numbers

8:30-9:15 PM Tuesday May 14

Gemara Makkot with Rabbi Mordechai Torczyner, for men, at 693 Knollwood

Age 12+ Reminding a person of past bad behavior; see Rashi to Vayikra 19:33

Age 8-12 A: Old

Age 4-8 B: 3 Years

Answers to Parshah Riddles

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